

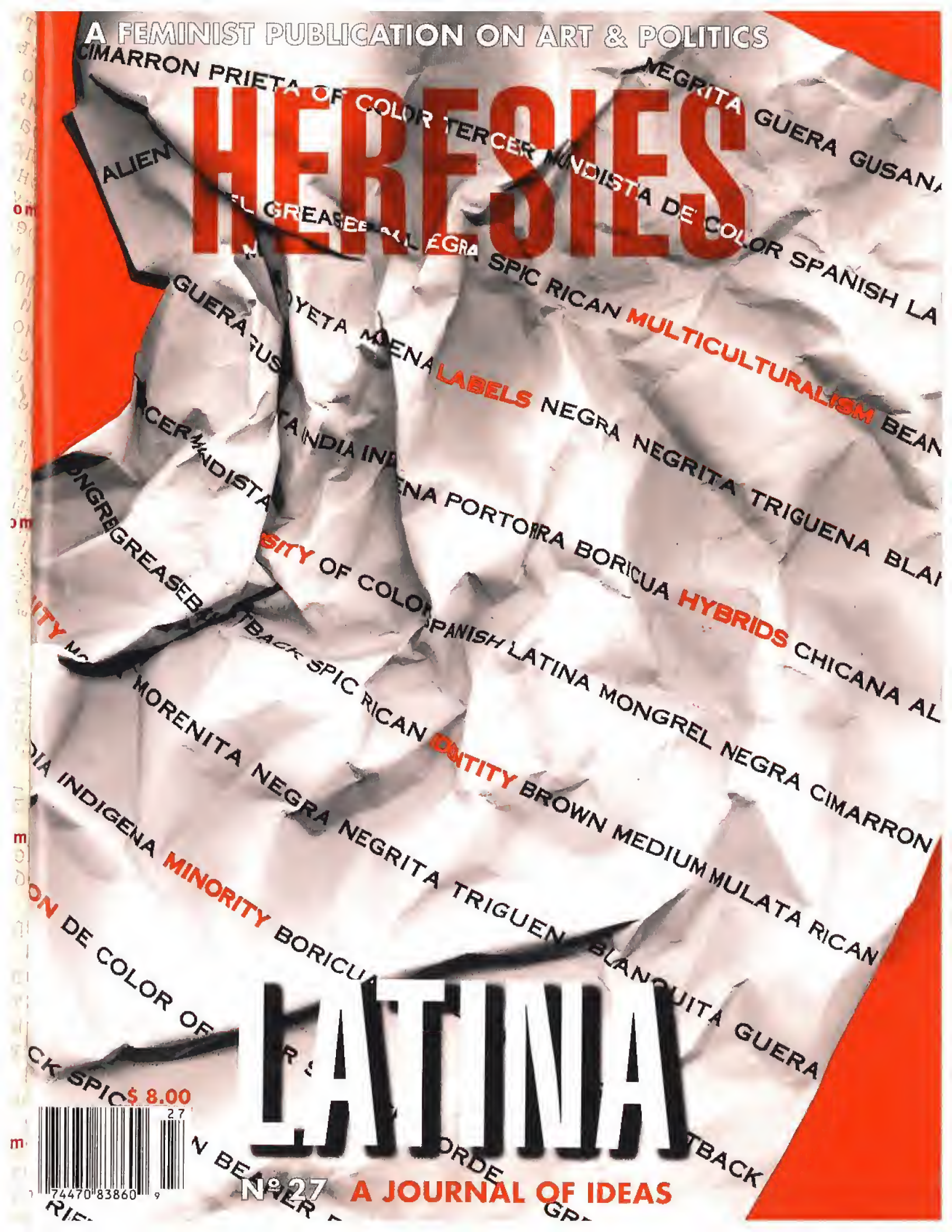
A FEMINIST PUBLICATION ON ART & POLITICS

# HERESIES

# LATINA

Nº 27

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS



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# LATINA

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*Heresies* publishes feminist fiction, nonfiction, political/cultural commentary, poetry, experimental writing, page art, and every kind of visual art. Each issue has a specific thematic orientation; please indicate on your envelope which theme(s) your work addresses. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a xerox, photograph, or slide with artist's name, title, medium, size, and date noted; however, *Heresies* must have a b&w photograph or equivalent to publish the work, if accepted. We will not be responsible for original art. All material must be accompanied by an SASE if you wish it to be returned. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. *Heresies* pays a small fee for published work.

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*Heresies* is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact and that in the making of art and all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that *Heresies* continues to stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory as well as to generate new creative energies among women. It is a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to broadening the definition and function of art.

*Heresies* is published by a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists, or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, curating, literature, anthropology, political science, psychology, art history, printmaking, photography, illustration, and artists' books. While the themes of the individual issues are determined by the collective, each issue has a different volunteer editorial staff composed of members of the mother collective and other women interested in that theme. *Heresies* provides experience for women who work editorially, in design, and in production. *Heresies* tries to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts, and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified, they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward the demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that through this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

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*In memoriam*  
**Viviane E. Browne**

**T**he collective process  
behind this 27th issue of  
*Heresies* began five years ago.

The original title was "¡Viva Latina!" — eventually discarded because of its evocation of clicking castanets, ruffled skirts, and Carmen Miranda hats. *Latina* is an awkward label to encompass the cultural diversity of two continents over the course of more than five centuries. In the U.S. the term becomes almost ludicrous when the majority outside a porous border becomes a "minority" within. History has shifted borders geographically, politically, and economically, and *Latina* carries much historical baggage.

From the beginning there was consensus among the editorial collective that the issue was to focus on cultural identity. Our potential contributors — artists, writers, poets, dancers, filmmakers, sociologists, lawyers, activists, art critics & historians — had long been engaged (with themselves and one another) in a dialogue on the topic. This issue of *Heresies*, renamed "*Latina—A Journal of Ideas*," pays tribute to the rich variety of expression in women's creative work — rigorous & free, profound and funny, timeless & contemporary.

During the five years of the issue's development, questions of identity in the domain of cultural/multicultural power relationships have become even more overt and complex, and the question of difference in ethnic and racial identity has become more and more central to cultural, sociological, and philosophical debate around the world. The importance of Latinas' contributions to this dialogue has become increasingly clear.

A decade of broadening discourse has thus led to reenvisioning the cultural community that is the United States, but systemic change has been uneven. Major mainstream cultural institutions continue to mount the occasional definitive, authoritative Latin American art exhibition. Frequently the scholarship and curatorial premises are problematic. Women have too often been underrepresented. Latino artists living in the U.S. have recently been omitted as well. One may question the contribution these large, transient exhibitions make to the field of art history. Do they herald an alteration of routine curatorial practice, or are they finite, self-limiting events intended to mollify a constituency? The re-evaluation of cultural community has created new funding opportunities. Major institutions outmaneuver grassroots institutions for multicultural arts and education funding, repositioning themselves in the face of impending demographic shifts.

In this landscape of shifting cultural borders, we of the "*Latina*" collective hope this issue of *Heresies* will help expand the ongoing discourse of self-definition. The initial editorial collective outlined the mission of the issue as the creation of a space for women of Latin American descent living or working primarily within the U.S., a space where Latinas could speak and listen to their own creative voices — room for her own. Following the first call for submissions, the project was delayed at various points. The collective tried several methods of opening up the editorial process. A debate about the politics of accepting National Endowment for the Arts money in an atmosphere of censorship interrupted work for a time. Simultaneously, much-needed funds from the New York State Council on the Arts were being drastically cut across the board.

The method used to compile this final version of "*Latina—A Journal of Ideas*" evolved as an attempt to respond to the diversity contained within the term *Latina*. Acknowledging that a three-member editorial collective could not presume to represent the multiple communities of the Latin diaspora, an invitation was extended to two dozen Latina artists, writers, and scholars across the U.S. Each of the respondents was asked to compile a 4–6 page segment for the issue. A dozen segments emerged from this process; two were contributed by members of the collective. To these was added a portfolio selected by the collective, culled from unsolicited material sent directly to *Heresies* or solicited by us from some of the artists whose work we felt should be present in the issue. Avis Lang provided general editorial and administrative support; her infinite patience and good humor were essential to the project. The innovative work of artist/designer Ana Linnemann involved a true collaboration with the material — personal yet respectful of the contributors' ideas and images. We owe special thanks to art activist/critic/*Heresies* cofounder Lucy Lippard. Her generous guidance and advice have been invaluable.

Although this issue of *Heresies* exceeds the usual length, it does not begin to exhaust the topic. True to the range of Latinas' expressive forms and to our intentions, it offers a kaleidoscopic rather than an authoritative survey. Within the open forum of *Heresies* it integrates approaches and issues previously perceived as disparate. We hope Latinas will continue to see this forum as theirs.

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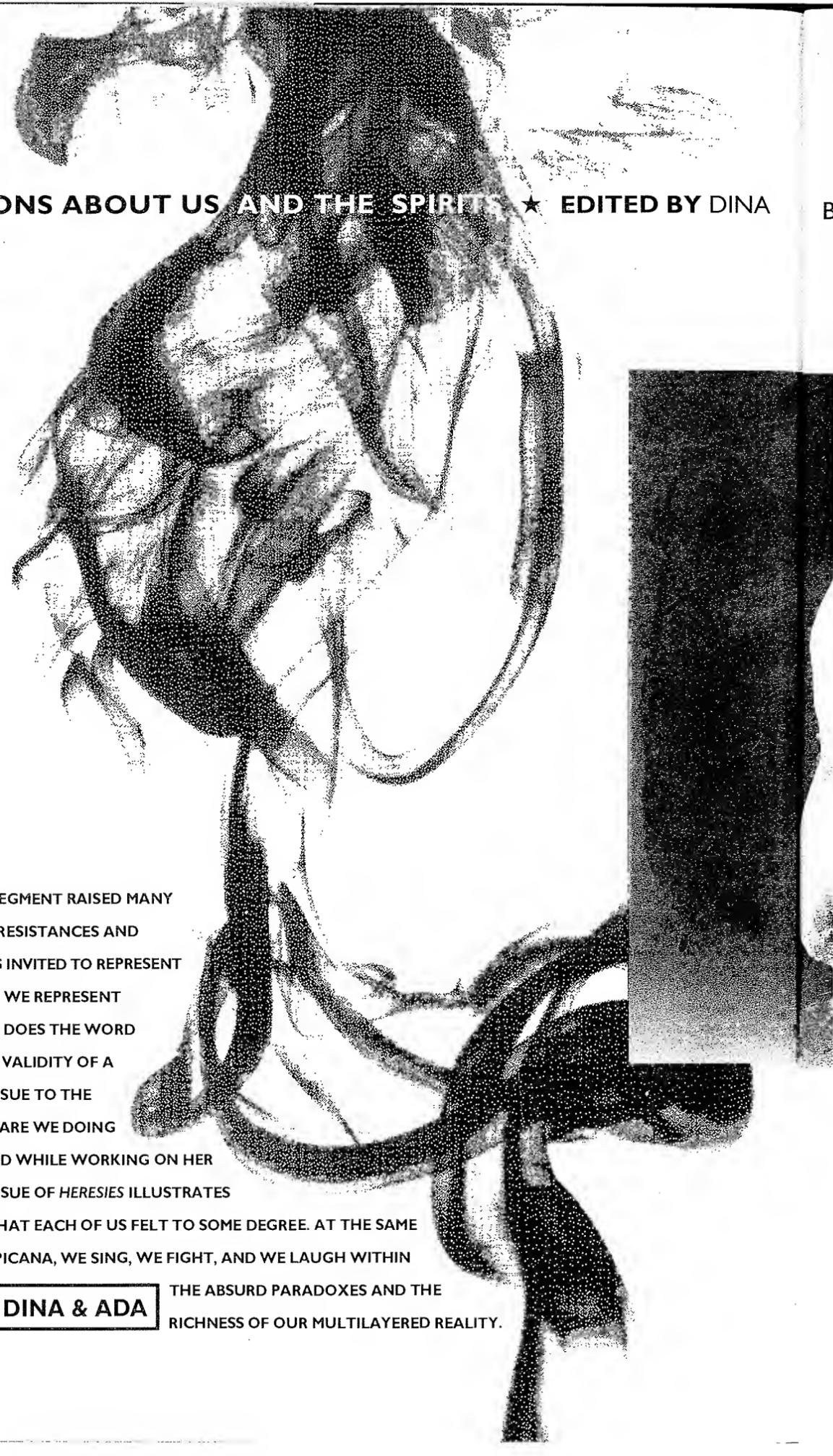
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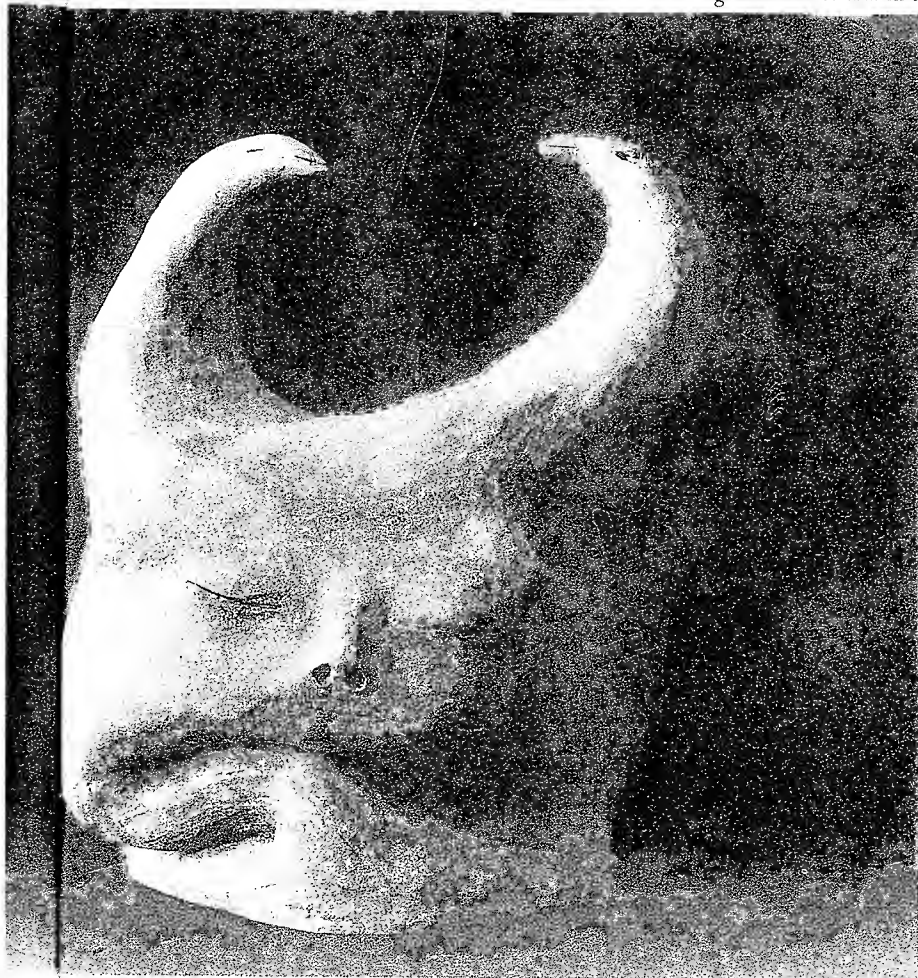
**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT US AND THE SPIRITS ★ EDITED BY DINA**

**B**

PUTTING TOGETHER THIS SEGMENT RAISED MANY CONCERNS. WE HAD SOME RESISTANCES AND RESENTMENTS ABOUT BEING INVITED TO REPRESENT LATINA ARTISTS. WHO CAN WE REPRESENT EXCEPT OURSELVES? WHAT DOES THE WORD LATINA MEAN? WHAT IS THE VALIDITY OF A MAGAZINE DEVOTING AN ISSUE TO THE SO-CALLED LATINA? WHAT ARE WE DOING IT FOR? THE DREAM ADA HAD WHILE WORKING ON HER CONTRIBUTION FOR THIS ISSUE OF *HERESIES* ILLUSTRATES SOME OF THE CONFLICTS THAT EACH OF US FELT TO SOME DEGREE. AT THE SAME TIME, LIKE CARMELITA TROPICANA, WE SING, WE FIGHT, AND WE LAUGH WITHIN

**INTRODUCTION • DINA & ADA** THE ABSURD PARADOXES AND THE RICHNESS OF OUR MULTILAYERED REALITY.

## A BURSZTYN &amp; ADA PILAR CRUZ



Dina Bursztyn  
*Dream Being*, 1991  
 clay.

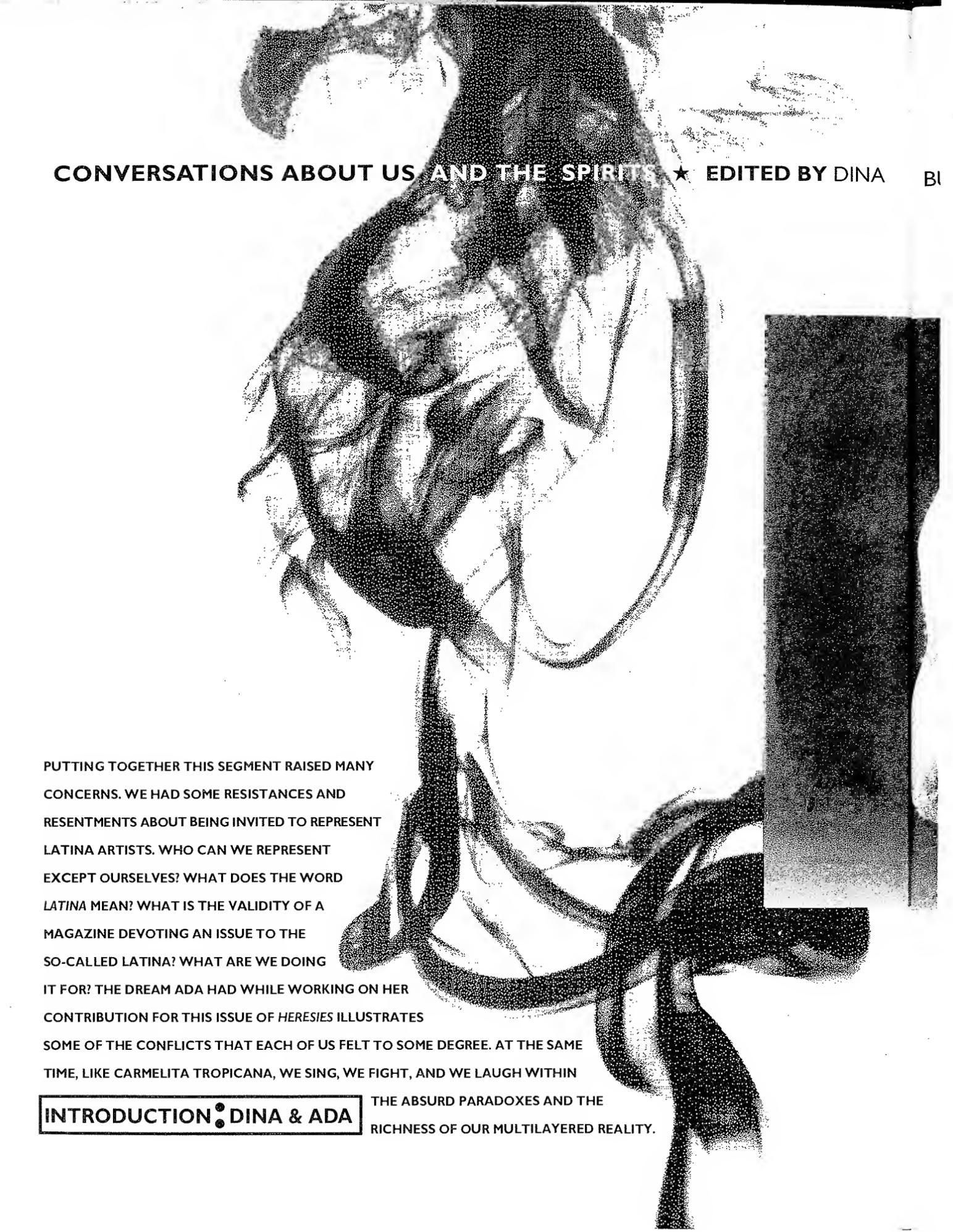
I am on the subway to the Bronx. A group of Latin women have asked me to coordinate a Latin American festival. I arrive at a park and go to some picnic benches where the meeting is taking place. I can feel the brightness of the sun, and when I look up at the sky, it is perfectly clear and blue. The grass around the picnic tables is moist and glimmers brightly green; at a distance is a woods of enormous pines. It all seems very regal. There is a hum of activity. Women are distributing food and refreshments to those at the meeting. I notice a thin, slightly built man collecting dues. Everyone is very happy and excited because it will be a beautiful festival as well as an important political event. I meet the women I will be working with and am told that the festival will comprise a parade, music, dancing, food vending of Latin American delicacies, and displays of indigenous costumes. I learn that the event is to be for *pure* Latin Americans. Then I realize that the women at the meeting are wearing two kinds of costumes: indigenous or western. In their indigenous clothing they appear very beautiful but unreal —

like people on a movie set. When I ask one woman about this, she tells me that the outfit will attract tourists. I nod. The Western clothing, by contrast, is unflattering, shabby dresses — something one could imagine a woman wearing so as not to ruin good clothes. I ask the same woman about this, and she again tells me, matter-of-factly, that these outfits will bring in tourists. I wonder who the tourists will be if this is to be a festival for pure Latin Americans. The woman goes on talking: "The rest of society will see that our festival is taking place; we have to accommodate our image to their expectations." Then she laughs and says, "But we know who we are." I don't understand. Her words leave me consumed with self-doubt. I have learned I will be in charge of public relations. I wonder which kind. Is the work I will do for the tourists, the "rest of society," or for the pure Latin Americans? I also wonder what they mean by *pure*. Costumes aside, I saw only European-looking women at the meeting — no Indians or blacks.

I am on the subway, returning from the meeting. I am with a black woman friend, describing the festival to her. She is very supportive and asks questions. She wants to know the date because she would like to attend. I am very worried about this. All I can say is, "They told me the festival is only for Latin Americans." She very seriously reveals that her great-grandmother was Cuban. I nod, more uncomfortable than before; somehow I know this is not what the group has in mind, and it is very disturbing. I feel I should not work on this festival. I wonder if the women think I am a pure Latin American. Is this the way I view myself? Is this how I want

society to view me? I keep remembering the sureness of the woman's response: "But we know who we are." Did she mean that in fact we *don't* know? I don't know much about my ancestors, but I believe they come from all over. Every once in a while some aunt of mine "lets a cat out of the bag," which the other aunts emphatically deny. Do my aunts know?

I now notice that the man who was collecting dues at the meeting has been standing in the train, listening. I am certain he can read my mind. He makes me nervous. He casually asks me how many people went to the meeting. Afraid he may think I cannot do a good job at public relations, I lie. About eight people had been present, but I come up with a different figure. He nods, as if reassured, and exits at the next stop. As the doors close, I realize he had collected the dues and the numbers will not add up when he counts the money. Will he think me a thief or know I'm a liar?



CONVERSATIONS ABOUT US AND THE SPIRITS ★ EDITED BY DINA BI

PUTTING TOGETHER THIS SEGMENT RAISED MANY CONCERNS. WE HAD SOME RESISTANCES AND RESENTMENTS ABOUT BEING INVITED TO REPRESENT LATINA ARTISTS. WHO CAN WE REPRESENT EXCEPT OURSELVES? WHAT DOES THE WORD LATINA MEAN? WHAT IS THE VALIDITY OF A MAGAZINE DEVOTING AN ISSUE TO THE SO-CALLED LATINA? WHAT ARE WE DOING IT FOR? THE DREAM ADA HAD WHILE WORKING ON HER CONTRIBUTION FOR THIS ISSUE OF *HERESIES* ILLUSTRATES SOME OF THE CONFLICTS THAT EACH OF US FELT TO SOME DEGREE. AT THE SAME TIME, LIKE CARMELITA TROPICANA, WE SING, WE FIGHT, AND WE LAUGH WITHIN

**INTRODUCTION: DINA & ADA** THE ABSURD PARADOXES AND THE RICHNESS OF OUR MULTILAYERED REALITY.

## MY FIRST ENGLISH LESSON • DINA

Shortly after I arrived in this country, I applied for a job at Korvette's during the Christmas season.

There was no interview; however, I had to do a simple math test. I did it well and was then given a large button to wear that read CASHIER TRAINEE. I and many others would undergo training for two weeks. Then we would have to pass a test in order to be hired for the whole season.

All of this I learned from a Puerto Rican man whom I had asked to interpret for me. My English was very poor at that time. Fortunately there were many Puerto Ricans in the group, and they took me under their wing. They whispered (so that my lack of English wouldn't be noticed) all about credit cards, sales tax, price codes, exchanges, making change, counting money, rolls of coins, coffee breaks, and fire exits. I learned every word by heart and practiced at home.

I had lunch every day with them, and I was touched by their friendliness, warmth, and wit. Soon they decided they had to interpret another kind of information: "Beware of the Jews," I was warned. I pretended to have a temporary hearing problem.

With a faltering voice I passed the test. I was given another large button that read CASHIER — DINA BURSZYTN.

I was assigned to a cash register next to a heavy white woman. She put her glasses on to read my name.

"Where did you say you were from?"

"I didn't say, but I am from Argentina."

"Ah, there's a large Jewish community there."

I nodded.

She and the other Jews took me under their wing. They helped me with my newly acquired cashiering skills. But soon they decided I needed more: "Beware of the Puerto Ricans," I was warned. I pretended my English was failing me.

All this time the manager of the greeting cards department, a handsome Haitian man, said nothing but smiled brightly at me. We started to have an affair, and although we tried to be inconspicuous, it became obvious to everyone. The Puerto Ricans, the Jews, and a couple of Black American women I had just started to befriend — all of them stopped talking to me.

While having lunch all by myself, I decided I had learned more than I had intended. I quit the job, but similar experiences never quit me. Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I cry, and often I tell how I learned English and something more at Korvette's.

**Ada Pilar Cruz**

Desasosiego, 1991, clay, earth, stone.  
Photo: Becket Logan.



As children we would go to Puerto Rico every summer. It was liberating. The beach. The mountains. The rivers. We ran wild. Woke up in the morning and burst out the door. Nobody asked any questions. New York was dangerous. Streets. Strangers. We had to stay inside. But on the island...

I learned how to dance on the island. I had my first love on the island. I drank cuba libres on the island.

Identity. Identity confuses me. Society or somebody wants me in some nice little category. Possibly I would like to oblige. In a category there is detention, no confusion. So... Latina! Sure!

I was ten when I moved from the South Bronx to Queens and found out I was Puerto Rican. Actually, I was called *spic*, but I didn't know what that was until I asked my cousin. I found out it was an insult and that I should be proud to be Puerto Rican. So I became proud of being Puerto Rican. It came in handy in high school. I went to a school that was predominantly Black. We were proud. Black and proud. Puerto Rican and proud. We had the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. I was fourteen years old and didn't really know who they were, so I cut school for an entire semester and went back to the South Bronx to try to find them. What I

## WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN • ADA

found was the Ghetto Brothers, a street gang made up of young Blacks and Latinos.

Here, I thought, was my identity. I got involved with a Puerto Rican guy who was a junkie. I thought I could change him. One day he got arrested and was sent to Rikers Island. He had been caught selling dope. More confused than ever, I went back to my cousin, who said, "Forget him." I did.

I went to Hunter College. Manhattan. I moved out of Queens. At last. I expected to meet some Puerto Ricans. I was studying art. There weren't many Puerto Ricans in the art department back then. In fact, I was the only one. Again. But I met some people from Latin America. They told me I was Latin American. They, however, were born in Latin America. I was born in New York. Our common denominator was that we spoke Spanish.

Most people I met ask me where I am from. When I tell them, they all agree that I do not look Puerto Rican. I used to try to look Puerto Rican. I wanted people to identify me. But I couldn't figure out how to look Puerto Rican. I asked my cousin. She said people told her the same thing. So, I supposed I came from a Puerto Rican family that just didn't look Puerto Rican.

I met my husband. Everyone had been telling me about this other Puerto Rican I just had to meet. Finally I met him. He is blond. He doesn't look Puerto Rican either.

I've stopped looking for Puerto Ricans. They're all over the place. They just don't look Puerto Rican. Recently, however, I've been told that I am not a Puerto Rican. It seems I am *Latina*.

Ada Pilar Cruz

Mere Effigies of Snells and Men,  
1991, clay, earth, stone.

Photo: Becket Logan.

**Carmelita Tropicana** ★ You know, when people ask me where I was born, all I can say is, well, it depends on what day of the week it is. If it's Tuesday, it might be Venezuela.

**Dina Bursztyn** ★ It doesn't matter for most people.

**CT** ★ It depends. When I go to those places — for example, when I go to Brazil, ¡Ay dios mio! I get so *saudade* de Brazil. Everything in Brazil is so sexy! The men, the women, the dogs — and the language. Even when they say the name of the bank: *Banco do Brasil*. Or Venezuela. I mean, when you go to a restaurant in my country, they ask you, "What do you want to eat?" Then you go to Venezuela. You go into a restaurant there, and a waitress asks you, "*¿Que te provoca?*" ("What provokes you?"). What can you say? You don't know what to say! You are without words, *sin palabras*. This is spiritual stuff. I spent one year in Brazil waiting for the New Year. It was the Blue Moon, and I went to one of the ceremonies they have on the beach of Ipanema. They have these beautiful statues and offerings for Yemanjá, the goddess of the sea. It's wonderful! I waited on line for one of the spiritual women. You're waiting and waiting there. She would go into this trance: she would close her eyes, touch you, and give you beads. When it came my turn, she just held my hand and touched my face. Then she started to laugh, then just shut up, and that was it!

**DB** ★ What does that mean?

**CT** ★ I don't know. It was wonderful! I think she knew I'm a comedian. It was like the Mona Lisa — what does she mean, what does she mean? Which is wonderful, because you can go anywhere with it when you don't know.

**DB** ★ I feel honored that Carmelita Tropicana has granted me an interview. Could you talk about your personal history — when and why you came to this country?

**CT** ★ In 1955 when I was, as always, nineteen years old. The Virgin said I would always be nineteen. I came because I was part of a revolution in Cuba. This revolution is not in the history books yet. My brother Machito and I were the masterminds, and the guns were hidden in the Tropicana nightclub. I am a revolutionary artist: "I sing, I fight" is my motto. But Machito, who was a waiter/poet at the Tropicana, got caught, and I had to escape in a rowboat. In the middle of the ocean, near the Bermuda Triangle, the Virgin appeared to me and said, "Carmelita, you have a mission: *Die kunst* is your *waffen*."

**DB** ★ Is that German? What does it mean?

**CT** ★ That's exactly what I said: "What do you mean, Virgin? That *kunst* sounds a little weird to me." And she replied,

"Carmelita, *die kunst* means art in German; *waffen*, your weapon. Go forth to the world, to the Lower East Side, to New Jersey, to Germany, and give them your *kunst*."

**DB** ★ And then?

**CT** ★ I arrived in Miami and had an epiphany. In fact, I have a lot of epiphanies every day.

**DB** ★ You're lucky. The Virgin must be protecting you.

**CT** ★ Well, all you have to do is believe, because the Virgin spoke with a Jewish accent.

**DB** ★ I'm impressed by the fact that you speak so many languages.

**CT** ★ If you live in New York you have to be *mucho multi* — multilingual, multisexual — because if you are not, you don't get the grant. If the grant guidelines require a Chinese, I might discover that way back I had a great- great-grandfather who was a *chino cubano*.

**DB** ★ How did you manage to become a performance artist?

**CT** ★ One day the filmmaker Ela Troyano called me to tell me that New York Foundation for the Arts had a grant for performance art, and I said, "Performance art — *que es eso, chica?*" And she replied, "Five thousand dollars." Then I thought, performance art, of course . . . I went *con esas palabritas americanas que ellos tienen y les meti* "deconstruction, deconstruction, deconstruction," and I got the grant.

**DB** ★ Where do you get the material for your pieces?

**CT** ★ From the 1950s and from the spirits. That comes from my Afro-Cuban heritage. Carmelita is always touched by the spirits. She has a lot of belief in her spirits. It can be the Virgin, it can be the animals — that's why I'm dressed like this — a leopard, a tiger. I am an animal, but all plastic, no real fur.

**DB** ★ Why is that?

**CT** ★ Don't endanger the animals. If I wear their skins, maybe they don't like it too much. I just borrow their spirits. This is why Uzi Parnes and I wrote this story about Hernando Cortés. We wanted to know exactly what happened in Mexico. Mexico is an incredible country! What happened between Hernando Cortés, Moctezuma, and the Aztecs there? Sometimes, to get to the truth — well, there's history . . . and sometimes Carmelita can write her-story. But we needed something else — you know, another witness: horse-story! And so we went to Hernando Cortés's horse, and we asked the horse what happened. Come to the show, you'll see.

**DB** ★ Do you often work with other people?

**CT** ★ Yes, I work with many different people, among them many Latinas. Also I have put several pieces together with the collaboration of Ela Troyano and Uzi Parnes, two Cubists and a Jew.

TALKING WITH



Photo: Paula Court

CARMELITA TROPICANA • DINA





Dina Bursztyn  
*Potato Spirit*, 1990  
 ceramic, 24" x 18" x 10".

## PHOTO ALBUM (for Judy) • DINA

Many photos ago  
 you and I were eating bread and cheese  
 on a mountain peak  
 hiking on the tail of summer  
 until we found the leaf  
 where the fall begins.

You me  
 and the canoe  
 splashing sounds, water lilies, beaver dams.  
 August slowly sliding by.

The two of us  
 on the beach with dinosaurs' footprints  
 in the field of sheep  
 on the mountain of blushing trees  
 with the spirit of night  
 the conversation of trees  
 the anchor of your hug.

(Many photos are missing.  
 We underexposed  
 and overexposed  
 the light of our love.)

Together we climbed twisting trails  
 dotted by mushrooms nodding to the rain.  
 I followed precisely your maps and steps  
 but sometimes lost you among the ferns  
 or stayed behind hiding inside a cloud  
 you could never find.

But again and again  
 together we  
 tiptoed on a cliff's edge  
 climbed backward in time  
 inside a Mayan chief's grave  
 watched sunsets from peaks and pyramids.  
 The bikes and the birds  
 wild roses by the road  
 songs of dead leaves  
 our smiles coated with snow  
 seasons turning  
 days and nights  
 years sliding by.

We grew together and apart  
 redistributed the weight in the packs  
 took detours, shortcuts in routines  
 until we reached the abyss  
 where there was no bridge,  
 no rock, no rope.

The last photos I took  
 are loose.  
 The Andes from my home town  
 in the August winter light  
 by myself  
 trying to remember  
 how my very first trip began  
 calling my ancestors  
 the mountains of my childhood  
 they who were  
 before you  
 before me.

# Cartas de Corazón

CONSUELO LUZ

"CARTAS DE CORAZON" FORMS THE SECOND PART OF AN INNOVATIVE RADIO DRAMA, "CON CORAZON," THAT AIRED WEEKLY ON FRIDAYS FROM AUGUST 1991 THROUGH JULY 1992. "CON CORAZON," WHICH I WROTE AND HOSTED, WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND WAS INCORPORATED INTO THE NATIONALLY SYNDICATED DAILY SPANISH RADIO PROGRAM "BUSCANDO LA BELLEZA."

CORAZON IS A MEXICAN IMMIGRANT SINGLE MOTHER WHO HAS COME TO THIS COUNTRY IN SEARCH OF ANGEL, A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER SHE HAD AN ENCOUNTER WITH AND FELL IN LOVE WITH BACK IN MEXICO. THE ON-THE-AIR CHARACTER OF CORAZON WAS CREATED AND PLAYED BY THE MEXICAN ACTRESS ELENA PARRES. INITIALLY THE PROJECT CONSISTED OF CONSUELO (MYSELF) DOING A WEEKLY INTERVIEW OF CORAZON. THE AUDIENCE IS NOT INFORMED THAT THE INTERVIEW IS A DRAMATIZATION, AND IT IS LEFT UP TO THEIR IMAGINATIONS WHAT TO BELIEVE.

IN THE COURSE OF THE FIRST PART OF THE SERIES CORAZON IS ABLE TO LOCATE ANGEL THROUGH THE HELP OF A FICTIONAL RADIO LISTENER, AND SHE DECIDES TO FOLLOW HIM TO THE ISOLATED WYOMING TOWN WHERE HE WORKS. THE NEXT PART OF THE SERIES CONSISTS OF THE WEEKLY LETTERS THAT CORAZON WRITES TO CONSUELO AND THAT CONSUELO READS OVER THE AIR.

## Gringa Accent

Dear Consuelo,

This time when I heard you reading my letter on the radio I didn't feel even a pinch of embarrassment. On the contrary, I looked at myself in the mirror and I said to myself (in English, because I am learning and practicing it), "You are the best, Corazone," but when I heard my *gringa* accent on my name I got nervous and I ran to the kitchen to make tortillas so as not to forget who I am. And I started to ask myself if that business of thinking of oneself as "the best" is a *gringo* thing and that I can't think like that because it is like a betrayal of what my mother taught me.

Mamá always used to say that it was the obligation of the woman to always put herself in second place and ever complain, and never, never did I see Mamá talking to herself in the mirror! The few times that I saw her even looking at herself in the mirror, it was only to rapidly brush her hair, as she said it, her long hair of a lost woman, and make it up into the eternal bun of the surrendered woman, although one time I did hear a little sound come out of her mouth like a little bird of sighs and misplaced dreams.

But I realize that I do not want the life that Mamá had, although it was a good life, rich and full of affection, children, geraniums, and patience, and that there is nothing wrong in being different, and it would be a betrayal to myself and my people to not take the opportunity to be "the best," *lo mejor*.

And when I listened to your program about the course that teaches how to discreate the beliefs that are limiting us, I understood that the beliefs with which I grew up are good as long as they benefit me, my family, and my community today, and that what I have to learn is to be able to tell the difference between the good that Mamá taught me and that which is no longer useful. And if they call me "Corazone" I will not get nervous; I will merely smile at the poor *gringos* that have such a hard time learning Spanish!

Your friend,  
Corazón

Estimada Consuelo,  
Esta vez al escucharte leyendo mi carta por la radio no sentí ni una pizca de vergüenza, al contrario, me miré en el espejo y me dije (en inglés, porque estoy aprendiendo y practicándolo), "You are the best, Corazone," pero al escuchar mi acento de *gringa* al decir mi nombre me puse nerviosa y corrí a la cocina a hacer tortillas para no olvidarme de quien soy. Y comencé a preguntarme si eso de creerse "the best" — "lo mejor" — es cosa de *gringos* y que no puedo pensar así porque es como una traición a lo que me enseñó mi madre.

Mi mamá siempre decía que era la obligación de la mujer siempre ponerse en segundo lugar y nunca quejarse, y nunca nunca la vi a mi mamá hablándose en el espejo! Las pocas veces que la vi mirándose en el espejo era no más para rápidamente cepillar su pelo, como ella lo decía, su pelo largo de mujer entregada, y hacerse el moño eterno de mujer perdida, y aunque una vez sí le escuché un sonidito salirle de la boca como un pajarito de suspiros y sueños extraviados.

Pero me doy cuenta que yo no quiero la vida que tuvo mi mamá, aunque fue una vida buena, rica y llena de cariño, de niños, geranios y paciencia, y que no hay nada malo en ser diferente, y sería una traición a mí misma y a mi gente no tomar la oportunidad de ser "the best" — *lo mejor*.

Y cuando escuché tu programa sobre ese curso que enseña a descrear las creencias que nos están limitando, entendí que las creencias con que crecí son buenas mientras me benefician a mí, a mi familia y a mi comunidad hoy en día y que lo que tengo que aprender es a diferenciar entre lo bueno que me enseñó mi mamá y lo que ya no sirve. Y si me dicen "Corazone" no me pondré nerviosa, sino me sonreiré de los pobres *gringos* que se les hace tan difícil aprender el español!

Tu amiga,  
Corazón



## Maclovia of the Hands of Heaven

Estimada Consuelo,

Esto de milagros no es juego, o si es juego, debe ser que Dios y todos los santos se entretienen sonriendo de oreja a oreja con el milagro escondido atrás mientras se nos va perdiendo la paciencia.

El Domingo los consejos que distes en tu programa para como resolver problemas me cayeron como limonada fría en agosto. Hablaste de regresar a lo primero que aprendimos, de pensar en habilidades que tenemos y de visualizar lo mejor. Me puse a pensar en mi bisabuela, Maclovia de las Manos de Manjar, así le decían porque era sobadora y tanta era su fama que dicen que el mismo Pancho Villa viajó noventa millas solo para antes de morir saber lo que era sentir esas manos milagrosas en su cuerpo de héroe cansado y ansioso. Dicen que sus palabras a Maclovia despues fueron, "Ahora sé lo que es la victoria." Y cuando el murió le vinieron las noticias a mi bisabuela que entre sus últimas palabras se escuchó, "Maclovia, buscaré tus Manos de Manjar en el Paraíso."

Bueno, creo que todo eso lo inventaron, pero, fíjate que esa noche a Angel le comenzó a doler el cuello por un tropiezo que había tenido en el trabajo. Yo, acordándome de lo que me enseñó mi bisabuela Maclovia, le comencé a sobar y pronto se le quitó el dolor. Le contó esto a su patrón John, y el día siguiente me llamó Laura, la esposa de John, a pedirme si le quería dar un masaje porque le dolía la espalda. Después del masaje me pagó treinta dólares y me dijo que yo tenía manos milagrosas y que conocía mucha gente que les interesaría una buena sobadora. ¿Qué más te puedo decir, Consuelo? Somos todos un milagro.

Tu amiga,  
Corazón

Dear Consuelo,

This business of miracles is not a game, or if it is a game, it must be that God and all the saints entertain themselves smiling from ear to ear with the miracle hiding behind their backs while we lose our patience.

Sunday the advice you gave on your program about solving problems was like cold lemonade in August. You talked about returning to the first things we learned, thinking of abilities we have, and visualizing the best. I started to think of my great-grandmother, Maclovia of the Hands of Heaven. They called her that because she was a sobadora, and so great was her fame that they say that Pancho Villa himself travelled ninety miles just to know, before he died, what it was like to feel those miraculous hands on his tired and anxious hero's body. They say that afterwards his words to Maclovia were, "Now I know what victory is." And when he died, the word travelled back to my great-grandmother that among his last words were heard, "Maclovia, I will look for your hands of heaven in paradise."

Well, I think that they invented all of that, but take note that that night Angel's neck started to hurt him from a stumble at work. I, remembering what my great-grandmother Maclovia had taught me, started to massage him, and soon the pain was gone. He told this the next day to his boss, John, and the following day John's wife, Laura, called me to ask me if I wanted to give her a massage because her back was hurting. After the massage she paid me thirty dollars and told me that I had miraculous hands and that she knew many people who would be interested in a good sobadora.

What else can I tell you, Consuelo? We are all a miracle.  
Your friend,  
Corazón

Estimada Consuelo,

En solo una semana ya he tenido cuatro clientes en mi nueva carrera de sobadora. La primera ya te conté fue Laura, la esposa de John (el patrón de Angel), y ella me recomendó a los otros, una mujer y dos hombres. Con las mujeres me fue muy bien, pero la verdad es que me puse nerviosa con la idea de darle un masaje a un hombre, pero me tomé un fuerte té de manzanilla (sin miel), me persigné tres veces y me use mi mejor cara de vieja arremangada, y todo nos fue bien, él se mantuvo con la toalla tapándole sus regalos privados de Dios, y yo hasta le encontré un empacho en el estómago que, con la ayuda del Espíritu Santo, alojé y puse en marcha afuera.

Entonces ya para Eddie, el segundo cliente hombre, me tenías toda confiada. Pero no sé si es porque no me tomé el té de manzanilla, no me persigné o entré con una sonrisa de mono recién caído de mata de coco, pero todo me fue mal. Primero se le cayó la toalla, o quizás Eddie, que hace negocios con John (el patrón de Angel) la hizo caer a propósito, porque cuando la fuí a recoger dijo, "Never mind," que preferiría el masaje sin toalla.

Comencé a masajearlo de boca abajo y me fijé que tenía un bulto como caliente en el costado izquierdo y se lo comenté. Entonces fue cuando él me agarró la mano y me dijo, "I'll show you where I'm really hot," jalándome la mano hacia ya tú sabes donde. Me salió un grito de "No!" como de gato enfermo y triste y jalé mi mano para atrás, pero él me agarró de nuevo y duro, esta vez tratando de forzarme encima de él, mientras trataba de desvestirme. En ese momento, te juro, Consuelo, me entró la imagen del Angel de los Rompecabezas (el misterioso rompecabezas de un angel mestizo que armó mi hijo Jandro) y me comenzó a dar un mareo y la mayor parte de mi almuerzo de arroz, frijoles refritos y huevos terminó encima de Eddie y de sus regalos privados de Dios.

Salí corriendo, oyendo sus obscenidades y sus gritos que si yo le contaba a alguien él haría perder el empleo a Angel. No te imaginas que feo me siento, violada, contaminada y amenazada. No sé qué hacer pero no tengo pena de leer esta carta en el aire, ya no pasan tu programa por acá, parece que la estación cambió de director y el nuevo director de programación no sabe lo que es bueno.

Tu amiga,  
Corazón

Letter No. 14

## The Private Gifts of God

I ran out, hearing his obscenities and his shouts that if I told anyone he would see to it that my boyfriend Angel lost his job. You can't imagine how awful I feel: violated, contaminated, and threatened. I don't know what to do, but don't be afraid to read this letter on the air. They don't know what to do, but don't be more; it seems that the station changed its director, and the new program director doesn't know what's good.

Your friend,  
Corazón

Dear Consuelo,  
In just one week I have had four clients in my new career as a sobodoro. The first I already told you was Laura, the wife of John (my boyfriend Angel's boss), and she recommended me to the others, one woman and two men. With the women everything went very well, but the truth is that I got nervous with the idea of giving a massage to a man. But I drank a strong chamomile tea (without honey), I crossed myself three times, and I put on my best sour-old-lady face, and everything went well. He kept his towel covering his private gifts of God, and I even found a blockage in his stomach which, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I loosened up and started on its way out.

Then for Eddie, the second male client, I was all confident. But I don't know if it's because I didn't drink the chamomile tea, I didn't cross myself, or because I came in with a smile of a monkey who just fell off a coconut tree, but everything went wrong. First his towel fell down. Or maybe Eddie (who does business with John, Angel's boss) dropped it on purpose, because when I went to pick it up he said never mind, that he preferred the massage without a towel.

I started to massage him face down, and I noticed that he was warm and swollen on his left side, and I commented on it. That was when he grabbed my hand and told me, "I'll show you where I'm really hot," pulling my hand toward you know where. I let out a shout of "No!" sounding like a sad and sick cat, and I pulled my hand back, but he grabbed me again and hard, this time trying to force me on top of him while pulling off my clothes. In that moment, I swear, Consuelo, the image of him Angel of Jigsaw Puzzles (the mysterious puzzle of a mestizo angel that my son Jandro had put together) came into my head; then I started to feel dizzy and nauseous, and the better part of my lunch of rice, refried beans, and eggs ended up on top of Eddie's private gifts of God.

## The Miracle of the Vomited Lunch

Dear Consuelo,

I have never felt such a big mix of feelings and thoughts in such a short space of time like I have felt this last week. It reminds me of one Three Kings Day when I was nine years old and the cat gave birth to eleven kittens, but my father put them all in a sack and drowned them in the river, saying that we already had cats.

My first thought was to go to the police to report him (not my father — Eddie), but then after thinking about it a little, I realized that it wouldn't be of much use. Anyway, it was only attempted rape, and besides, I didn't have any proof. Who were they going to believe: Eddie, with his latest model Jeep Cherokee and his smile of the Marlboro cowboy, or Corazón, the Mexican sobadora without papers? Forget it.

My next dilemma was whether to tell Angel or not. He would probably feel obligated to defend my honor, and he would go out in search of Eddie, who he would find in a bar full of his friends and loaded rifles. Forget it.

At the least, Angel would get angry at me for going around giving massages to men with blond hair, and he would try to prevent me from continuing my career as a miraculous sobadora, although the miraculous seems to be turning into the disastrous. Forget it.

And if I told Laura, she would tell John who would tell Eddie who would invent something horrible so that John would fire Angel. Forget it.

But what if Eddie asks for another massage? I feel so alone, alone with my shame, anger, and disgust — and fear, fear of losing it, all because of one cruel (or stupid) man. The only thing that gives me pleasure is the memory of his face when he saw my lunch of rice, refried beans, and eggs shoot from my mouth on top of his private gifts of God. It was another miracle, Consuelo; my Angel of the Jigsaw Puzzles protected me with the Miracle of the Vomited Lunch. That, at least, reminds me what it is like to smile.

Your friend,  
Corazón

Estimada Consuelo,  
Nunca he sentido una mezcla tan enorme de sentimientos y

pensamientos en un espacio tan corto, como he sentido esta última semana. Me recuerda un Día de los Tres Reyes Magos cuando yo tenía nueve años y la gata dio a luz a once gatitos y mi papá los puso a todos en un saco y los ahogó en el río diciendo que ya teníamos gatos.

Mi primer pensamiento fue ir a la policía a reportarlo (no a mi papá, a Eddie) pero después de pensarlo un poco me di cuenta que de nada serviría. Además de que yo no tenía prueba ninguna, ¿a quién le iban a creer? — ¿a Eddie con su Jeep Cherokee de último modelo y su sonrisa de vaquero Marlboro o a Corazón, la sobadora Mejicana sin papeles? Olvídate.

El siguiente dilema era si contarle a Angel o no. El seguramente se sentiría obligado a defender mi honor y saldría en busca de Eddie a quien encontraría en una cantina llena de sus amigos y de rifles cargados. Olvídate.

O por lo menos Angel se enojaría con migo por andar dando masajes a hombres de pelo rubio y no me permitiría seguir mi carrera de sobadora milagrosa, aunque ya lo de milagrosa se está convirtiendo en desastrosa. Olvídate.

Y si le contaba a Laura, ella le contaría a John quien le contaba a Eddie quien le inventaría algo horrible para que John despidiera a Angel. Olvídate.

¿Pero qué si Eddie me pide otro masaje? Me siento tan sola, sola con mi vergüenza, enojo y asco, y miedo, miedo de perderlo todo por un hombre cruel (o estúpido). Lo único que me da gusto es la memoria de su cara al ver mi almuerzo de arroz, frijoles y huevos disparar de mi boca encima de sus regalos privados de Dios. Fue otro milagro, Consuelo, mi Angel de los Rompecabezas me protegió con el Milagro del Almuerzo Arrojado. Eso, por lo menos, me recuerda lo que es sonreír.

Tu amiga,  
Corazón

Estimada Consuelo,

A los huevos revueltos de mi vida ahora se ha juntado el chile picante.

Cuando John se enteró que su esposa, Laura, había ido al fiscal a ofrecerle un testigo (yo) contra su cliente, Eddie, que está siendo enjuiciado por violar a otra mujer, se armó una buena, ya te imaginas. Laura me dice que su esposo la llamó imbecil, ella lo llamó criminal. El le dijo que con sus emociones malpuestas iba a destruir vidas, ella le dijo que los hombres violan, destruyen vidas y después se protegen unos a los otros. El le dijo que lo único que le importaba a ella eran sus ideas feministas egoístas, ella le dijo que se fuera a un sitio peor.

Al mismo tiempo Angel me grita que porque le conté a Laura, que las mujeres hablan mucho, que nunca le gustó que yo andara de sobadora, que como indocumentados no tenemos derecho a quejarnos si alguien abusa de nosotros, y yo le grito que como ser humano, nadie tiene el derecho de abusar de mí, que ya es tiempo que la mujer grite al mundo la verdad y que el hombre aprenda que ya no puede hacer lo que quiere con nosotras. Y que mi bisabuela sobadora Maclovia de las Manos de Manjar me había enseñado su sabiduría y sus secretos para que yo los compartiera sin vergüenza y ayudara a aliviar el dolor en el mundo como ella lo hizo durante más de ochenta años de sobar y hacer milagros.

Ay, Consuelo, no sé como va a terminar esto, pero me siento como una leona, leona de selva pobre, eso sí, pero leona.

Tu amiga,  
Corazón

## Letter No. 18

### Lioness of a Poor Jungle

Dear Consuelo,

To the scrambled eggs of my life has now been added some hot chile. When John found out that his wife, Laura, had gone to the District Attorney to offer him a witness (me) against John's client, Eddie (who, it turns out, is being put on trial for raping another woman), that really stirred up a good one, you can imagine. Laura tells me that her husband called her an imbecile, and she called him a criminal. He told her that her misplaced emotions were going to destroy lives; she told him that men rape, destroy lives, and then protect each other. He told her that the only thing she cared about were her selfish feminist ideas; she told him that the only thing he cared about was money. He told her to go to the devil; she told him to go to a worse place.

At the same time, Angel screams at me because I told Laura, that women talk too much, that he never liked that I go around as a sobadora, that as undocumented ones we don't have the right to complain if someone abuses us, and I scream back that as a human being nobody has the right to abuse me, that it is time that women scream to the world the truth and that men learn that they no longer can do whatever they want with us. And that my great grandmother Maclovia of the Hands of Heaven had taught me her wisdom and her secrets so that I could share them without shame and help to alleviate the pain in the world like she did during more than eighty years of massaging and making miracles.

Oh, Consuelo, I don't know how this is going to end, but I feel like a lioness — a lioness of a poor jungle, that yes, but a lioness.

Your friend,

Corazón



# Shouts of All Colors

Estimada Consuelo,

Las buenas noticias son que Angel ha conseguido al fin sus papeles, con la ayuda de John, y está documentado y estasiado, dice que se siente como que ha estado enterrado bajo la tierra en un sitio oscuro y húmedo y lleno de susurros y bocas tapadas. Y ahora dice que puede salir a la luz y gritar gritos de todos colores y cantar, cantar, cantar sin miedo que le vean el sombrero.

Estoy feliz por él, pero las malas noticias son que John averiguó donde yo y Laura estábamos viviendo y ha venido ya tres noches seguidas a molestar a Laura. Ella no lo deja entrar pero el de afuera le toca música en su estéreo, le lee cartas de amor y poesía, le jura que nunca más le va a hacer daño, pero a veces se enoja y entonces le tengo que tapar las orejas a mi hijo Jandro porque los gritos sí son de todos colores, pero colores fuertes. Y anoche trajo la muy mala noticia que Eddie está amenazando con denunciarme a la Inmigración si yo doy testimonio en su juicio.

Me dan ganas de gritar yo también a todo color, Consuelo, todas las malas palabras de todo el mundo en todos los idiomas y de toda la historia, pero entonces comienzo a pensar, ¿para qué ensuciar más al mundo? Laura me dice que debo expresar mi frustración y enojo, pero no quiero asustar a Jandro y además me acuerdo lo que me enseñó mi bisabuelo Maclovio de las Manos de Manjar que "una sobadora es como una artista que usa los colores con conciencia y sabiduría, no los tira al aire, sino los mezcla y los aplica con amor y paciencia, así vivirás tu vida, así curarás."

Consuelo, pase lo que pase, mis gritos de todos colores serán canciones de amor de esas de nuestros pueblos, dulces y fuertes como la sangre mestiza, canciones blancas, canciones rojas, canciones azules y multicolor, cantadas con la paciencia de siglos y con la esperanza de un mundo mejor.

Tu amiga,  
Corazón

Dear Consuelo,

The good news is that Angel has finally gotten his papers, with the help of John, and he is documented and ecstatic. He says that he feels as if he had been buried under the earth in a dark and humid place full of whispers and covered mouths. And now, he says, he can go out into the light and shout shouts of all colors and sing, sing, sing without being afraid that they will see his hat.

I am happy for him, but the bad news is that John found out where Laura and I are living and has come already three nights in a row to bother Laura. She doesn't let him in, but from outside he plays music on the stereo for her, he reads love letters to her and poetry, he swears that he will never harm her again, but sometimes he gets angry and then I have to cover my son Jandro's ears because the shouts are of all colors, but strong colors. And last night he brought the very bad news that Eddie was threatening to denounce me to the Immigration if I testify in his trial.

I feel like shouting too, in full color, Consuelo, all the bad words of all the world in all the languages and from all history, but then I start to think, Why dirty the world more? Laura tells me that I should express my frustration and anger, but I don't want to scare Jandro, and besides, I remember what my great-grandmother Maclovio of the Hands of Heaven taught me — that "a sobadora is like an artist who uses colors with conscience and wisdom; she does not throw them in the air but mixes them and applies them with love and patience; that is how you will live your life; that is how you will heal."

Consuelo, whatever happens, my shouts of all colors will be songs of love like those of our villages, sweet and strong like mestizo blood, white songs, red songs, blue songs, and multicolor songs, sung with the patience of centuries and the hope of a better world.

Your friend,  
Corazón



## Velvet of the Devil

Estimada Consuelo,

Ayer me llamaron como testigo contra Eddie en su juicio por violar a la Doctora Goodman. Cuando les conté al jurado sobre el Milagro del Almuerzo Arrojado, que me pude escapar de Eddie cuando vomité encima de él, yo les vi unas sonrisitas, hasta el juez tuvo que taparse la boca para que no lo vieran reírse. Pero cuando les conté sobre mi bisabuela Maclovía de las Manos de Manjar quien me había enseñado el arte de sobar, los vi muy interesados, algunos comenzaron a sobarse el cuello, otros a mover la cabeza de un lado a otro, todos sus cuerpos parecían estar moviéndose, pidiéndole ayuda a mis manos.

Y me acordé de una vez que mi bisabuela Maclovía me dijo, "Corazoncito, el cuerpo no miente, las palabras pueden ser como terciopelo del diablo, pero el cuerpo dice la verdad," y me pregunté si el juez sabía leer a los cuerpos o si se dejaba engañar por las palabras y en eso miré a Eddie, el acusado, y me dio pena, se veía triste y seco, como una mata de sandía sin regar. ¿Le había llegado su hora, después de cuántas mujeres humilladas?

Y yo nunca me hubiera imaginado que yo jugaría este papel en la vida de un hombre, y en eso vi a Angel sentado en el banco de atrás junto a la puerta y le vi una expresión de admiración y amor que me llevó el corazón a la garganta y el estómago a los pies y me sentí sonrojar tan caliente que creo que hasta con mi piel morena el juez se dio cuenta y se aclaró la garganta y me agradeció por mi testimonio.

Y al final, aún el terciopelo del diablo en sus palabras no le hizo nada bien a Eddie, lo encontraron culpable, y después Angel me tomó de la mano, me miró con esos ojos de miel espesa y allí, en la mera Sala de Justicia de un pueblito en Wyoming, aún sabiendo que dentro de poco me deportarían fuera del país, me pidió que me casara con él.

Cuando una gran felicidad se mezcla con una gran tristeza es algo que da miedo, Consuelo, pero un miedo caliente que se derrite en algo rico, hondo y puro, y de repente ves con tu mera alma qué cerca están las lágrimas a la risa, la pasión a la paz, la muerte a la vida, y el terciopelo del diablo al amor.

Tu amiga muy, muy emocionada,  
Corazón

Dear Consuelo,

Yesterday they called me as a witness against Eddie in his trial for raping Dr. Goodman. When I told them about the Miracle of the Vomited Lunch, that I was able to escape from Eddie when I vomited on top of his private gifts of God, I saw some little smiles on them. Even the judge had to cover his mouth so that we would not see him laughing. But when I told them about my great-grandmother Maclovía of the Hands of Heaven, who had taught me the art of being a *sobadora*, I saw them very interested. Some started to massage their necks, others to move their heads from one side to the other; all their bodies seemed to be moving, asking help from my hands.

And I remembered one time that my great-grandmother Maclovía had said to me, "Corazoncito, the body does not lie; words can be like velvet of the devil, but the body tells the truth," and I asked myself if the judge knew how to read bodies or if he let himself get fooled by words. And then I looked at Eddie, the accused, and I felt pity — he looked so sad and dry, like a watermelon plant that hasn't been watered. Had his time come? After how many humiliated women?

And I never imagined that I would play this part in the life of a man, and then I saw Angel sitting on the bench at the back next to the door, and I saw an expression of admiration and love that took my heart to my throat and my stomach to my feet, and I felt myself blush so hot that I think even with my dark skin the judge noticed and cleared his throat and thanked me for my testimony.

And in the end, not even the velvet of the devil in Eddie's words did him any good. They found him guilty. And afterwards Angel took my hand, looked at me with those eyes of thick honey, and there, right in the Hall of Justice of a little town in Wyoming, even knowing that soon I would be deported out of the country, he asked me to marry him.

When a great happiness mixes with a great sadness, it's something to put the fear of God in you, Consuelo, but a hot fear that melts into something rich, deep, and pure, and suddenly you see with your very soul how close are tears to laughter, passion to peace, death to life, and the velvet of the devil to love.

Your friend who is very, very full of emotion,  
Corazón

# Tripe to Heart

Estimada Consuelo,

Por fin me pude juntar en persona con la Doctora Goodman. (Yo le dije que su nombre debería ser Goodwoman.) Ella está muy interesada en el sistema de sobar que me enseñó mi bisabuela Maclovia de las Manos de Manjar y también me dijo que estaba muy agradecida e impresionada por el valor que mostré al ofrecirme como testigo en el juicio y arriesgar mi residencia en este país. Ahora ella me está ayudando a conseguir mis papeles y la próxima semana comenzaré a trabajar en su clínica.

Al hacer de tripas corazón, nunca me imaginé que todo saldría tan bien. John (quien emplea a Angel y hacía negocios con Eddie) me vino a pedir perdón por tratar de chantajearme con la documentación de Angel y él y Laura están yendo a terapia juntos para tratar de salvar su matrimonio. Resulta que Eddie era solo uno de los dueños de la cadena de tiendas que ofrece los productos de John y los otros dueños han querido seguir comprándole a John. Eddie servirá cinco años en prisión por el crimen de violación.

Jandro está contentísimo porque pescó su primer pescado. El y Angel se van de pesca juntos y Angel ahora lo llama "Trucha." Nunca he visto una sonrisa como la que le sale cuando Angel le dice, "Hey, Trucha," se infla como un globo de luz y le salen sonrisas hasta de los bolsillos.

Yo le he dicho a Angel que quiero conseguir mi tarjeta verde antes de casarme con él, porque así todos sabrán que me caso por amor y no por papeles.

Me siento fuerte como un álamo y nueva como la primavera, alegre como si me hubieran invitado a las fiestas quinceañeras de todas las santas. En mi corazón hay una estampida de caballos enamorados cabalgando hacia el mar, hacia el monte y hacia el cielo a la vez, con un millón de alas haciendo música libre y profunda para que bailemos en comunidad y amor en esta tierra, hombres completos y mujeres completas compartiendo el fruto del tiempo.

Tu amiga siempre,  
Corazón

Dear Consuelo,

At last I was able to get together with Dr. Goodman. (I told her her name should be Goodwoman.) She is very interested in the massage healing system that my great-grandmother Maclovia of the Hands of Heaven taught me, and she also told me that she was very grateful for and impressed by the courage I showed in offering myself as a witness in the trial and risking my residency in this country. Now she is helping me get my papers, and next week I will start working in her clinic.

All in all, from tripe to heart, I never imagined that everything would turn out so well. John (Angel's boss who did business with Eddie) came to apologize for trying to blackmail me with Angel's papers, and he and Laura are going to a counselor together to try and save their marriage. It turns out that Eddie was only one of the owners of the chain of stores that offers John's products, and the other owners want to continue buying from John. Eddie will serve five years in prison for the crime of rape.

Angel is so happy because he caught his first trout. He and Angel go fishing together, and Angel now calls him Trucha. I have never seen a grin like the one that he makes when Angel says to him, "Hey, Trucha"; he puffs up like a globe of light, smiles coming out even from his pockets.

I have told Angel that I want to receive my green card before we get married, because that way everyone will know that I am marrying for love and not for papers.

I feel strong like an alamo and new like the spring, happy as if I had been invited to the quinceañera parties of all the saints. In my heart there is a stampede of horses in love, galloping toward the sea, toward the mountain, and toward heaven all at once, with a million wings making free and deep music so that we may dance in community and love on this earth, complete men and complete women sharing the fruits of time.

Your friend always,  
Corazón

# PORTFOLIO

EDITED BY COCO FUSCO

Coco Fusco Guadalupe  
García-Vásquez Maria  
Hinojosa Merián Soto  
Coatlicue/Las Colorado  
Celeste Olalquiaga Maria  
Elena González Elia Arce

Coco  
Fusco

## The Origins of Intercultural Performance in the West

Performance art in the west did not begin with Dadaist events. Since the early days of the Conquest, "aboriginal samples" of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas were brought to Europe for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment. Those people were forced first to take the place that Europeans had already created for the savages of their own medieval mythology; later, with the emergence of scientific rationalism, the human specimens on display served as proof of the natural superiority of European civilization, of its ability to exert control over and extract knowledge from the so-called primitive world, and ultimately of the genetic inferiority of non-European races.

Over the last five hundred years nonwestern human beings have been exhibited in the taverns, theatres, gardens, museums, zoos, circuses, and world fairs of Europe and the freak shows of the United States. The first impresario of this sort was Columbus, who brought several Arawaks to the Spanish court and left one on display for two years. Among the most famous cases were many women: Pocahontas was taken to England to promote Virginia tobacco; Saartje Benjamin, popularly known as the Hottentot Venus, was thought to embody bestial sexuality because of her large buttocks; and the Mexican bearded woman Julia Pastrana continues to be displayed in embalmed form to this day. While the quincentenary celebrations focus primarily on European voyages to the Americas, it was actually these human exhibitions that enabled most Caucasians to "discover" the "other."

In most cases, the persons who were exhibited did not choose to be put on display. More benign versions continue to take place today in festivals and amusement parks with the partial consent of the "primitives." Contemporary tourist industries and the cultural ministries of various countries still perpetrate the illusion of authenticity to cater to



the western fascination with otherness. So do many artists.

In commemoration of five hundred years of practices that inform contemporary multiculturalism in the west, I undertook a series of site-specific performances with Guillermo Gómez-Peña over the course of 1992. We lived in a gilded cage for three days in Columbus Plaza in Madrid, Covent Garden in London, the Smithsonian Institution, the Field Museum in Chicago, and the Australian Museum of Natural History in Sydney. In each case, we presented ourselves as aboriginal inhabitants of an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had been overlooked by Columbus. We performed authentic and traditional tasks, such as writing on a laptop computer, watching television, sewing voodoo dolls, and doing exercises. Interested audience members paid for authentic dances, stories, and polaroids of us posing with them.

More than half our visitors thought we were real.

Coco Fusco  
*La Cabrana Anacaana*, 1992.  
Photo: Glenn Halvorsen.

## Guadalupe García-Vásquez **Regression 500**

1992 was a year of rediscovery for me as for all the peoples of the Americas. When I went to Mexico in the fall to perform *Regression 500*, I learned that to declare yourself Mexican in Mexico is now a political statement. In fact, it's easier to deal with the imposed "othering" of U.S. culture than with the condescending attitudes of your "own" people. The art world in Mexico is so hung up with being "international" (as in "free trade") that it brands artists like me who live in the U.S. and deal with the complexities of Mexican identity as "Chicanizers." Fortunately, when the gallery fails, the streets come to the rescue. On October 12, 1992, I did a performance as part of a demonstration by indigenous groups at the *Arbol de la Noche Triste*, where Cortes is said to have wept after his single defeat by the Aztecs. We corrected official history by renaming this tree the *Arbol de la Victoria*.

My work as both visual and performance artist unfolds on two distinct levels: the gallery/theatrical space and the street. On the one hand, I collaborate with writers, musicians, stage directors, etc., on multimedia pieces that collage mythopoetic scripts with visual elements (costumes, slide/video projections, installations). On the other, I enter the public space of the street to express a direct response to urgent social and political issues. I seek to open myself to my immediate environment, to transform art into life and vice versa, and most important, to involve four simultaneous planes in this process: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. Politics and metaphysics, as far as I am concerned, are not mutually exclusive.

In the future I want to use my work to go more deeply into forgotten or ignored traditions, including Mexico's indigenous rituals and languages and the contributions of African cultures — the *tercera raiz* — to the Mexican world. The time is always *now*, and I must enter into it.



**Guadalupe García-Vásquez** as Coatlicue, 1992.

Photo: Hilda Spaan.

Maria  
Hinojosa

## True Statements



WE REALLY THINK YOU ARE GREAT...WOW! WE NEVER MET ANYONE LIKE YOU. HOW DID YOU SAY YOUR NAME IS PRONOUNCED? WHY DO YOU SAY YOUR NAME LIKE THAT ANYWAY? I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. COULD YOU TRY AMERICANIZING IT? AS THEY SAY, IN ROME DO AS THE ROMANS DO...IN AMERICA DO AS... YOU ARE SUCH A LITTLE CONCHITA, A LITTLE CHIQUITA BANANA, A LITTLE FIRECRACKER... ARE ALL MEXICANS LIKE YOU?... I MEAN, WE REALLY LIKE YOU, BUT CAN YOU

**T O N E I T D O W N**

FOR THE CAMERAS? YOU LOOK SO TRIBAL. WHERE DO YOU BUY YOUR CLOTHES? I WISH I COULD LOOK LIKE YOU... AREN'T YOU SCARED TO GO INTO ALL THOSE NEIGHBORHOODS?... I LOVE YOUR HAIR. IS IT NATURAL?... COULD YOU BE MORE OBJECTIVE?... THAT SOUNDS BIASED. WE NEED TO PROTECT YOU... GOSH, A LATINA WHO IS INTELLIGENT. ARE THERE ANY MORE OUT THERE LIKE YOU?

Merián  
Soto

## Sensuality and Pleasure

Since the early 1980s I have been working with improvisation in what I call energetic work. Based on a deep experiential knowledge and awareness of functional anatomy and inner geography and informed by my love of salsa and my experience as a go-go dancer, I've developed a series of evolving structures or improvisational modes to access a personal movement language and approach that bypasses Eurocentric forms and expressions and speaks directly of my reality as a Puerto Rican woman living in New York. The celebration of sensuality and pleasure is a strong component of this work.

Improvisation demands a total use of the dancer's sensory, mental, physical, and emotional capacities — all of which are a result of her history (cultural, temporal, physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.). It demands total presence, senses open — listening, watching, observing, molding, conjuring, directing, following energetic/electrical/emotional impulses. The immediacy of the moment that is evoked through this presence is what interests me in performance. Through presence we reveal ourselves to our audience. This generous and sensual act allows us to share with audiences our humanity and emotionality.

A reexamination of sensuality (that which pertains to the senses) as an integral element of all

dance has become necessary today when so much culture seems to have become numb to the soft, open receptivity which I equate with sensuality — the opening-up of the pelvis, or indeed any part of the body, to allow energy/emotions/thought/sensations to flow through.

I have addressed these issues directly in my dances since 1989. *Tú y Yo* is a simple choreographic structure that is in essence a strip act. The dancer presents herself to the audience, revealing herself through the successive removal of layers of clothing, all the while directly confronting the audience and dancing in response to her perception of the audience's reactions and her own feelings.

In *Broken Hearts* I created a mode where we gently follow and sense the movement initiated in the pelvis and its repercussions through the body. There is an emphasis on placing the pelvis deliberately on the floor and then allowing the rest of the body to settle softly onto it. The women's section works with this settling as solo material and incorporates elements recognizable in go-go dancing: crawling while looking over the shoulders, sitting positions in which the legs and hips and open, eye contact with the audience, swaying the hips. In one section we use magnifying glasses to "reveal" parts of our semi-naked bodies to the audience.

In the duet for James Adlesic and Evelyn Vélez the placing of the pelvis on the floor evolves to placing the pelvis on the other's pelvis, increasing in pace as the dancers move from lying to standing. The effect of two bodies scrambling to settle their pelvises on each other's is a highly erotic duet in which traditional sexual roles are obliterated.

*Sacude* is a work in salsa and shake modes. While dancing a rumba, the dancer allows the impetus of shaking to move from the pelvis and torso through the rest of the body. The shaking is explosive, constantly renewing itself. The dancer rides the speed and momentum like a surfer riding a wave. The moment she reaches a place of exhaustion, the shaking establishes itself again, rising from unexpected places. It is exhilarating for the dancer (and the audience): a celebration of the pleasure and power of our bodies.

I find it interesting that only once has a critic addressed the sensuality of these works. What is it about sensuality and pleasure that critics fear or are blind to?

Merián Soto in *Tú y Yo*, 1989.  
Photo: Dona Ann McAdams.



## Coatlicue

### Las Colorado



For over ten years we have been performing together as actresses, writers, and storytellers in and around New York City. We are founding members of Coatlicue/Las Colorado Theatre Company (Coatlicue is the Aztec goddess of the earth — the creation goddess) and also founding members of Off the Beaten Path, Inc., a traditional/contemporary Native American theatre ensemble.

We draw from our ancient culture and traditions, weaving stories of the goddesses as well as personal and family stories. The Nahuatl language is incorporated into our work, affirming our survival as urban Indian women.

Our recent plays include *1992: Blood Speaks*, a look at Columbus through Native eyes, and *Huipil: Power of Our Dreams*, in which we combined ancient myths woven on our huipil with present-day stories of social and political injustice, genocide, and racism. In 1990 we created *Coyolxauqui: Women Without Borders*, about a goddess who was beheaded by her brother, cut up in pieces, and buried in the earth. Her story is one of silence, sexuality, and spirituality, and we wove it into stories of the borders imposed upon us by society as well as by ourselves. In our version of *La Llorona* she seems to float along country roads, rivers, and streams, crying for the loss of a child, the loss of Indian nations. Her wail/cry/song represents the voices of all women, our pain and joy as we empower ourselves.



TOP:

**Coatlicue/Las Colorado**

*Walks of Indian Women: Aztlán to Anahuac*, 1989.

Photo: Jean Claude Vasseux.

BOTTOM:

**Coatlicue/Las Colorado**

*Huipil: Power of Our Dreams*, 1992.

Photo: Jean Claude Vasseux.

## Megalopolis: Contemporary Urban Sensibilities

an excerpt\*

An interesting illustration of the way postcolonial parody works can be found in an episode of what must be the most well-known South American popular festivity — Brazilian carnival. An old tradition involving both the local community, which prepares year round for the three-day extravaganza, and the international marketing of tourist goods, the carnival features as its main spectacle the parade of samba schools. Each school parades an *enredo* (theme) with a magnificent display of outfits and dances called *fantasias* (fantasies). Made up of thousands of dancers and singers and several *carros alegóricos* (allegorical carriages) through which the theme is recreated, each school dances its *enredo* for forty-five minutes along the Sambódromo, a long stadium that serves as an artificial avenue.

One of the most brilliant of such thematic allegories focused on the mechanics and consequences of global urban reality. A retrofuturistic Indian metropolis, Tupinicópolis, the second finalist in 1987's competition for best samba, described the Tupi Indians, happy inhabitants of an unbridled cosmopolis where,

amid neon and trash, they rode supersonic Japanese motorcycles and played rock music, wearing the Tupi look: brightly colored sneakers, phosphorescent feathers, and blenders as the headgear. Its *carros alegóricos* showed a high-tech urban scenario complete with highways, skyscrapers, and neon signs.

The humorous Tupinicopolitan aesthetic recycled Hollywood's postcolonial pop image, producing a sort of Carmen Miranda in 1987 Tokyo. It carnivalized both the perception of Latin America as "primitive" and the glamour and distance of high technology by putting them together: executive Tupi Indians skating around glittery cityscapes and consuming city life to the utmost. In so doing, this *enredo* brought forward two constitutive issues for Latin American and Latino culture. These issues help explain how the habit of simultaneously processing different cultures in Latin America anticipated postmodern pastiche and recycling to the point where it could be affirmed that Latin American culture, like most postcolonial or marginalized cultures, was in some ways postmodern before the First World, a pre-postmodernity, so to speak.

The first issue is the ability to simultaneously handle multiple codes. Accustomed to dealing with the arbitrary imposition of foreign products and practices, this culture has learned the tactics of selection and transformation to suit the foreign to its own idiosyncrasies, thus developing popular integration mechanisms that are deliberately eclectic and flexible. Rather than reflecting a structural weakness, this infinite capacity for adaptation allows Latin American culture to select what is useful and discard what it deems unimportant.

The second issue has to do with Tupinicópolis's depiction of the self-referentiality of urban discourse. The growing visual and iconic qualities of contemporary perception have turned to the city as the foremost scenario, an endless source of ever-changing images. Intensified by the mirror reflections of corporate architecture, cities become a place to be seen rather than to be lived in. This spectacular self-consciousness (the consciousness of being a spectacle) is familiar to cultures that have been regarded "from above" by colonization. What can be more self-conscious than the allegorical parade of an imaginary city on an artificial avenue?



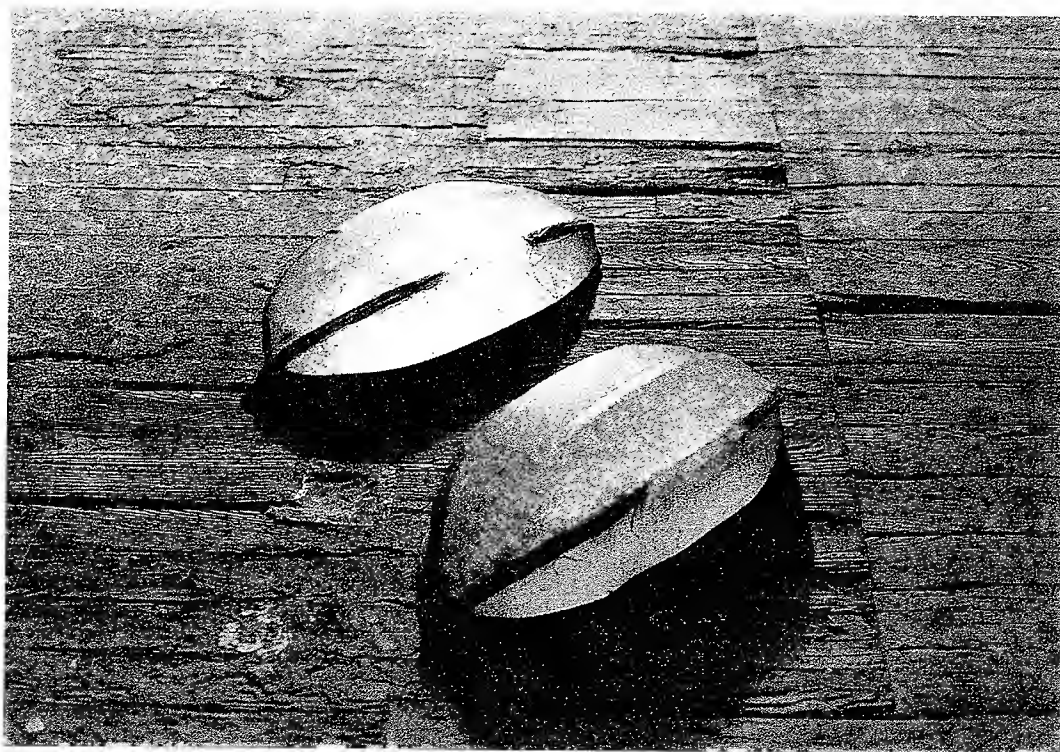
Barto Simpson

\* Celeste Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis: Contemporary Urban Sensibilities* (Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1992); *Megalopolis: Sensibilidades Culturales Contemporáneas* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1993).

**Maria Elena  
González**

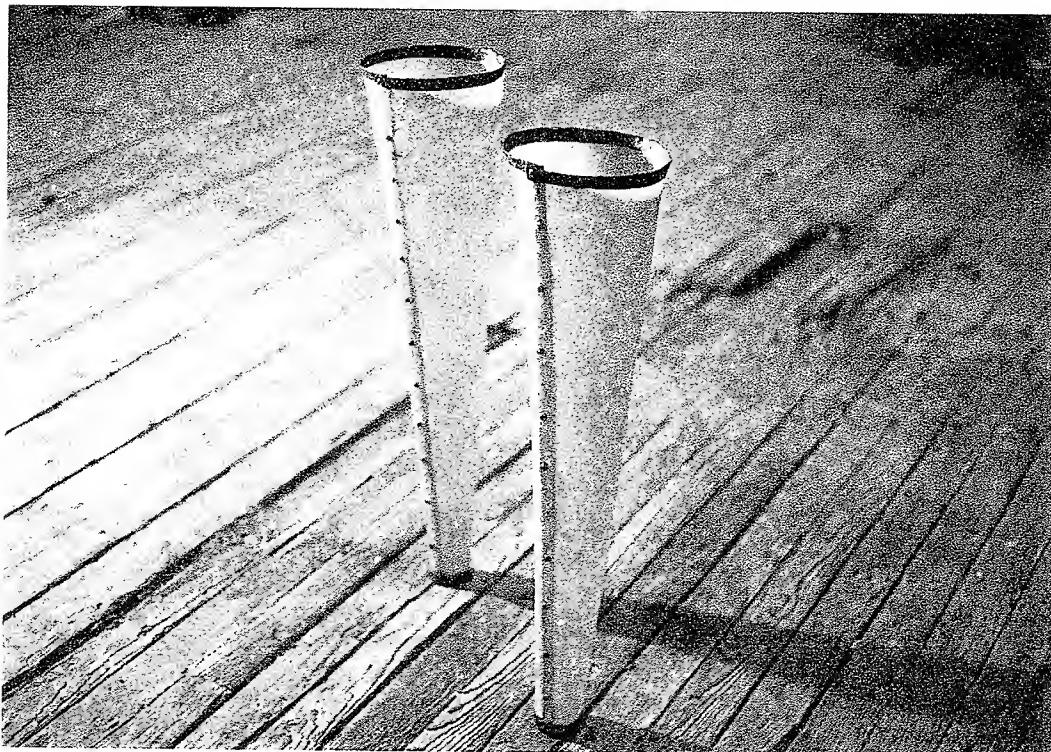
**Maria Elena González**

*untitled*, 1992  
wood, metal, rawhide, lead  
8" x 32" x 30".



MUCH OF MY WORK IS CONCERNED WITH VIEWER PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION. I ACHIEVE THIS THROUGH THE USE OF DRUMS/RAWHIDE AND SENSUOUS SURFACES. ENCOURAGING A HANDS-ON INTERACTION CHANGES THE STANDARD WAY OF VIEWING ART, ELIMINATING THE DISTANCE. THE IMMEDIACY OF

TOUCH, A PHYSICAL LANGUAGE UNIQUE TO SCULPTURE, HAS THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE AND TRIGGER INFORMATION. MY WORK IS INFORMED BY A COMBINATION OF ORGANIC, SEED, PLANT, BONE, AND SHELL SHAPES THAT ARE OFTEN JUXTAPOSED WITH GEOMETRIC AND MECHANICAL ELEMENTS.



**Maria Elena González**

*Legs*, 1992  
rawhide and lead  
32" x 24" x 12".

Elia  
Arce Mom



Elia Arce  
Photo: Javier Gomez-Serrano.

Mom said last night that one should have children in order to have something to live for. And all of a sudden I felt like I was pregnant. I fell asleep and dreamed that I wanted to have a baby. A tiny little girl. I wanted to be able to do with her all the things I would have wanted my mother to do with me. I wanted to hold her in my arms and tell her how much I loved her, over and over till she fell asleep. I wanted to teach her things like — oh, I don't know, maybe I just wanted to hang out with her for a while. I would tell her that she could be anything she wanted in her life, that she could go places and see things. I would also tell her that she was beautiful and that she could touch her crotch whenever she wanted. And that other people could touch it too, ONLY WHEN SHE WANTED IT AND IF SHE WANTED IT. And that it didn't matter if it was a girl or a boy, that those are just labels big people use in order to control their psychoses. And I would go with her to the supermarket to buy all different kinds of condoms so she could try them all and choose the ones she liked best. And I would give her dental dams for Christmas presents. And I would cry a lot with her and laugh. And I would tell her to get angry and scream whenever she felt she needed to. And I would tell her, STAND UP FOR YOURSELF, STAND UP FOR YOURSELF. Don't let anybody humiliate you; nobody is better than you; never think that somebody is better than you because of the color of your skin. Stand straight, with pride, with confidence, like you own the world. Fulfill all your dreams; don't let anybody or anything stop you. DON'T LET ANYBODY OR ANYTHING STOP YOU . . . NOT EVEN ME! And then she would turn toward me and slap me. And I would say, GO AHEAD, SLAP ME. Don't let me embarrass you. HIT ME, I said, HIT ME! Don't let me get in your way. KICK ME! Do all the things I always wanted to do but couldn't. HIT ME! GO AHEAD, I'M WITH YOU! PLEASE SLAP ME! PLEASE KICK ME! PLEASE BE WHO I WANTED TO BE BUT COULDN'T! PLEASE BE ALL THE THINGS I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE BUT COULDN'T! PLEASE! HIT ME! KICK ME! SLAP ME! HIT ME! KICK ME! SLAP ME! HIT ME! KICK ME! SLAP ME!

Ah!

9

V

**Nine Voices**  
**Hearing from the Next Generation**

edited by **Marina Gutiérrez**

Page art 36–37 by Kukuli Velarde

I was born and raised in New York City and became an artist through no fault of the elementary or junior high schools I attended. As a ninth grader asking for an application to the High School of Music and Art I was told by a counselor, “They wouldn’t be interested in students like you.” Only through the forceful encouragement of an African American girlfriend did I go on to Music and Art. I have in turn tried to provide a similar service to 150 students a year as director of the Cooper Union Saturday Program. Since 1979 I’ve struggled, despite underfunding and institutional adversities, to provide opportunities for NYC public high school students — a population estimated to be 87 percent minority: African, Latin, and Asian American. My students have been, to varying degrees, underserved by the decaying discriminatory school system. While we successfully prepare approximately 80 percent of

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our graduates for college, an outstanding percentage in the public school context, the effect of racism in art education is devastating, especially for minority females. The impact is most acute on young African American women, with young Latinas experiencing similar levels of devaluation. The exclusivity of the art world is systemic. Thus, for this issue of *Heresies* I've invited seven current and former students to share in a conversation. These young women are survivors of the New York City public schools and potential part of the next generation of "Latina" artists:

**Vanessa Fernandez** 18, born and raised in New York (high school student);

**Michelle Hernandez** 21, born and raised in Trinidad, West Indies, now living in New York (high school graduate, applying to colleges);

**Hanoi Medrano** 16, born in Dominican Republic, living in New York six years (high school student);

**Lisa Navarro** 18, born in Colombia, raised in Queens, New York (high school graduate, applying to colleges);

**Alejandria Perez** 19, born in Dominican Republic, living in New York six years (high school student);

**Susana Ruiz** 19, born in Spain, living in New York ten years (Cooper Union student);

**Haymee Salas** 19, born in Dominican Republic, living in New York thirteen years (Cooper Union student).

#### **MG: What is your first memory of making art?**

AP: I remember in fifth or sixth grade my mom bought me a watercolor set. We had records, and I used to draw the covers and glue the drawings on the wall. I had the whole room full of ugly drawings, though some of them were really nice. Those were my first drawings. I didn't know it was art; it was just fun. I never went to a school for art until I came here.

JH: I started working with watercolor, but it wasn't serious at all. The teacher didn't really care. She wasn't a teacher — she was just there.

HM: I remember I was four or five — a kid! I used to have colored glue and a white sheet of paper; you do something on one side, fold it, and open it up again. Some weird mixed-up shape comes out like a butterfly. Like wow!

HS: I was always drawing. In junior high it was just do whatever. When I got to high school I found something I could hold onto. It wasn't just knowing how to draw; I brought the same ideas with me constantly, and that's what I'm doing now in col-



lege. There are themes I got from high school that I'm still working on.

LN: My mom told me that when I was five or six, I used to like to draw figures. Then when I got to be eight, I would write stories and make up pictures for the stories.

SR: I have a very bad memory, but I remember when I lived in Spain there was some sort of contest. I remember doing a colored-pencil drawing of the princess and the tiger. I submitted it to a contest, and then my family moved here. About three months later I got a letter from my friend saying I'd won. It was a shock. There was a neat prize, but I couldn't get it.

VH: I remember doing an Easter basket in the second grade. Me and a guy, we were the best, because everybody else used to go outside the lines. The teacher kept the best ones up on the board, and I just remember being up there.

#### **MG: How did you choose to become an artist? What helped you make the choice?**

HS: I still don't know! It was never a question for me. I never said to myself, well, what am I going to do? Somehow I always knew, and I never deviated from that. That's it.

HM: I used to be a ballerina, but I was always drawing. Then I came here in 1988. Here you have special art schools. Things are different in Dominican Republic. I got here and my mom said, You can do this. School teaches you this. You can be an artist. And I did it.

### **“Art is an everyday thing, like math.”**

AP: When I was small I didn't know you could make a career out of painting. I knew about acting because of my mom. She used to sing when she was young. I wanted to be an actress or a dancer, and I was really good when I was small. I knew I liked to draw, but I didn't know you could make a career out of it until I came here and started reading about artists and museums. I never went to a museum of the arts till I got here, and it was really great. I didn't make the choice actually. I had the feeling that I was good at painting and if you would leave me in a room to paint by myself for a month, it would be great. If I don't make it as an artist in galleries and stuff like that, I want to be an art teacher.

MI: I've always known I wanted to be an artist but not just stick to drawing and painting, to extend



the work a little more, because art is an everyday thing, like math. You use it every day. There's a lot to it.

LN: I decided to become an artist because at first it was a diversion for me as a child, and I knew it was a way of expressing my feelings and ideas.

VH: I don't think the question addresses me. I haven't chosen to be an artist yet. Actually I'm not an artist, but I do admire art so much! I look up to it! It's really hard for me, but I have respect for it, I love it.

**“You don't believe in racism until it hits you.”**

**MG: What are your memories of school, and how would you compare the U.S. educational system with other systems?**

AP: Over there you're so innocent!

HM: Like when you're in your country, you know about nothing—

AP: No racism.

HM: No, there's no racism, none of this stuff like today's diseases. You don't hear that in school over there—

AP: It's covered up.

HM: It's totally different over here. When you go to school you dress however you want. Over there it's disciplined: you have a uniform, regulation black shoes, white socks, combed hair, clean nails. Over here you don't want to do homework? — that's fine, you just fail. Over there you have to stand up every day. You're a number, not a name. Here you can argue with the teacher. Some people even curse at them, and they pass you anyway. Over there they have the right to beat you up in front of the class.

**MG: Which is better?**

HM: Over there! Way better.

AP: I don't think so.

HM: Over here you get freedom. That's why there are criminals.

**MG: So it was better for you over there?**

HM: It wasn't better for *me*, but it's better for some people!

**MG: But you didn't become an artist over there.**

HM: True. I didn't know about it, that's why. I get more freedom here.

AP: In Dominican Republic it's so strict, all these rules, and they really make you afraid to speak

your mind. You can't cross the line because you'll get in so much trouble. Here they let you be free — that's why I love it here! I got beat up by a teacher in Dominican Republic. They threw me out, and my father went there, and they fired the teacher. It was a big scene. I don't think it's better there. You know nothing. It's a big cover-up. Here they're so open-minded. It's sad when you come from D.R.; you have to learn about racism, about being careful because—

LN: Because of reality!

AP: Yeah, like getting raped. You're a little kid, you come here, and you learn about all these sad things that are happening. Drugs, don't do this, don't do that. You just freak out. When I came I was scared. People tell you things, and you don't think they're true until they happen to you. You don't believe in racism until it hits you. I'm happy because it never hit me. I will never talk back to a teacher, and I don't believe this country's like this because they give you too much freedom — that's bull crap! Give freedom, and you're going to go outside and kill somebody or rob a bank?? That's bull crap! It's all from your background, the way you were raised.

LN: My memories from going to school in Colombia are vague, but I do remember it being very strict, a lot of taboos. You can't be an individual, you can't be yourself.

HM: You have to be someone for someone else.

LN: Especially being a woman.

**“As intellectual education the system here is at the bottom.”**

**MG: Especially being a woman?**

HM: Especially being a woman!

LN: Yeah, in Latin America.

HM: Over there it's a macho thing, a macho country.

SR: It's very strict in Spain, especially Catholic school. Here many more things have to be integrated into the educational system, especially in New York City.

**MG: Which system was better for you?**

SR: I remember coming here and learning in fifth grade what I had learned in third grade there, and being very upset because it was a waste of time. But I had to go through it because of language. As intellectual education the system here is at the bottom; American grammar and high school students



rated number one as to how they feel about themselves but lowest in actual level of education, according to a poll in *The New York Times*.

HS: I don't really remember Dominican Republic. I was four. What I do know is that education is connected to the parents, because the family in D.R. is the center of everything, and I guess it's connected to religion, Catholicism, that's why it's so strict.

**MG: How many of you went to a Catholic school — everybody? What about you, Michele? You went to school in Trinidad.**

MH: Yes. It's strict like Dominican Republic, and the education is much better than over here. Here they slow you down, they put you back. When I came here I had finished high school, and they wanted me to go back! To do all that work over again was upsetting. It was really stupid. I had to drop out and continue with something else.

**MG: And you spoke English, so that wasn't the issue!**

HM: I'm sixteen and a senior — two years ahead — so I'm doing good. But when I came here I had finished seventh grade, and they wanted to put me in seventh grade again, just because I didn't know the language.

“I remember coming here and learning in fifth grade what I had learned in third grade there.”

AP: It happened the same way to me. I was in the sixth grade, so I went to the seventh grade here, but then they failed me because I didn't know the language. That's why they have the ESL [English as a Second Language] program here in New York City. You're not supposed to fail a grade.

HS: Being put into a bilingual program in second grade was good for me. You learn the language quickly, but my parents made sure I remained in bilingual until the fifth grade. I'm glad they did that, because now I know both languages. In the fifth grade I entered the Spanish spelling bee, which was really good for me.

AP: I had the opposite of that. They put me in an ESL program and it sucked so bad, it was incredible! I didn't learn anything, yet I went on to high school. Freshman year I'm in ESL again, and I'm still not learning. I say, Come on, what's going on? — I'm hanging out with my friends in ESL class and talking in Spanish! I'm not in D.R. anymore; I already know Spanish, I know how to write (not too



well), and I know how to read. So I said to my mom, Write the school, I want to be in the regular program. I'm stuck not learning, having fun with my Dominican friends.

HM: That's another thing. They put you in ESL and leave you there.

LN: When I first came here I was six years old, and they stuck me right into an all-English class. I was so confused. I got in trouble so many times because I just didn't understand what was going on. Then they decided to switch me into bilingual, and I was there until fourth grade.

HM: Sometimes you get outcast. The other kids have been there two to three years, and they're learning English, but you know nothing. Sometimes they laugh and curse at you.

AP: It happened my first class here. The teacher was just talking and talking and I was just out of the boat. She was going blah, blah, blah, and I was thinking, Holy shit, what the hell is she saying? She was always in the way, too. I couldn't see the board and kept asking my friend, How do you say *perdóneme*? It took me a week to learn *excuse me*.

HM: You used to say *ekuse me*.

AP: *Ekuse me, man*. I was amazed by learning a new language. It was really embarrassing, so I made a lot of jokes. I was like the class clown, so nobody made fun of me. Actually, I made fun of people.

MH: It was different for me. I have a Spanish name, and they put me in a Spanish class, but I don't speak Spanish. The teacher started talking to me, and I was looking at her like she was crazy.

**MG: So how did you feel in the end about the transition from one school system to another?**

LN: I wanted to leave — I didn't like it.

AP: I loved it!

HM: I was so excited because, Oh my god, I was going to New York, and in Dominican Republic, everybody dreams, *Ay lo[s] paises*. That's what they call it. Everybody's like, Oh my god, *americano*!

AP: *No joda*.

HS: I got here much younger, so they put me in kindergarten, but I cried every day going to school. I didn't understand a word, of course. I hated it for a long time, even till the fifth grade. God, I wanted to get out of this country, to go back. And that was my parents' attitude too. The point was to come here, get economically improved, and then leave.

SR: Nobody improves.

HS: No, of course not.



LN: I was bad, just a very angry child, nothing to do with being foreign and feeling inferior. Certain things as a kid growing up in Latin America contributed to my being such a violent child.

AP: It was wonderful for me. I came here around Christmas, and it started to snow. I'd never seen snow and was in the window all night long: *O papi, sácame afuera*, I want to play with the snow. It was great, but the only disappointing thing was I saw big piles of black plastic bags in the street. I didn't know what it was. *¿Papi, qué to' eso?* What the hell is that on every corner? "That's garbage, darling." Ahhh, garbage. I thought New York was really lovely and beautiful, because the people go back to Dominican Republic with fake jewelry, ten-karat gold shit, and they show off. They put things in your head that New York is wonderful, everything's handed to you, the country of opportunities.

**MG: So you got opportunities?**

AP: Hell, no! I was really disappointed. I was expecting a beautiful clean place, and I get all this garbage in the street the first night I get here. The first week of junior high — the hormone age — you try makeup, you go to the bathroom and start smoking. It's incredible. I was amazed at the way these girls were talking in Spanish. Oh my god! I started trying things to know what's happening. I did really bad in junior high.

**MG: You mentioned racism. How did you learn about that?**

AP: Being in a class with Black kids and living in the neighborhood, the first year I was attacked by four or five Black teenagers. I was alone and didn't know the language that well. It was really scary, and since then I'm wearing silver.

HM: They still jump you?

AP: Not anymore. When you come from another place you're scared, and it shows in your face, the way you walk, and everything. It won't happen to me anymore. I guess I'm more tough and more careful.

HM: It never really affected me as being racism. I've been living in neighborhoods with Jewish and Russians — whites. We moved a lot, but my mom won't move if she knows there's certain types of people or things going on. She first look and ask people, Who lives here, what do they do, is it quiet?

HM: Really good. In my building they don't mind. If you live there, it's yours.

LN: Me and my mom moved here when I was six. We were trying to find a place to live, and it was obvious that people didn't want to rent us an apartment because we were foreign. That's how it

started. Then when I was in first grade, I was attacked and robbed of my jewelry. Later on I went to a predominantly Hispanic and Black junior high for a year, and I got into trouble a lot because I didn't really mix in with the Hispanic kids. I didn't dress like them or talk like them or act like them, I guess because I grew up in a neighborhood where I was with a lot of Greek, Polish, and Irish kids. I didn't know if I wanted to be like them. I had a terrible year. Then from seventh grade I went to junior high for gifted kids. I felt really good because I was surrounded not only by Hispanics but oriental and different cultures.

**“I was expecting a beautiful clean place, and I get all this garbage in the street the first night I get here.”**



**MG: Michele, coming from Trinidad, how were you treated here?**

MH: Well, here the Black Americans think that West Indians are too full of themselves, and so they put you down. I remember the teacher asking what we wanted to do after school, and I said art and architecture. One of the guys said, "Oh, you think you're white!" — a very stupid statement.

**MG: Anybody know any female Latin artists?**

LN: You.

HM: Carolina Herrera. She's a fashion designer.

AP: I know a jewelry designer.

VE: Oh yeah, Paloma Picasso.

**MG: What about you two in college, taking art history courses?**

SR: I can't think of any.

HS: You mean contemporary?

**MG: What about male Latin artists?**

SR: Oh, of course.

HS: Juan Sanchez.

**MG: But you met him here, in The Saturday Program.**

AP: Renee — The Graffiti Dude. We went to his studio. He's from Venezuela and so proud of it, and bilingual, Hispanic, just like us! I really look up to him.

LN: There are lots of Latin Americans at the Art Students League — immigrants from Mexico, Colombia, and Puerto Rico. Some of them have gallery shows.

**MG: You all share some kind of Latin cultural**

**base. Does that come across in your work?**

LN: It's a recent thing for me. I look back and regret not relating to the kids I grew up with. There are so many beautiful things about my culture that I don't know and want to find out.

**MG: How do you think that will express itself in your art work?**

LN: I've been reminiscing about my childhood and trying to express in my paintings what I remember about Colombia. Actually, one of the first inspirations was Haymee's artwork in the LaGuardia High School gallery.

AP: Was it a class project?

HS: No, it was just relevant to me. It was senior year. You know how you get so many assignments in school? I guess I reacted to work that was irrelevant to what I wanted to do. So I painted plantains — *plátanos* — on a rice bag. I started saving Goya bean bags and rice bags, playing. I don't know how I came to the idea. I just did it. But afterwards I'm not sure how seriously I took it. It's kind of a Dominican joke.

**MG: Where has that taken you?**

HS: I'm still painting *plátanos*. I'm preparing another painting now, but I don't know how my teachers are going to react. Freshman year I just showed assignments. I only did one piece that related to me and the teacher responded positively. It encouraged me. But in general, the school experience I'm having is that most teachers address a piece in terms of art history — like, this is a cliché, so don't do it, or, this is sentimental, so don't do it. So if I present a painting of *plátanos*, I don't know how seriously they're going to take it, because it's very personal. They don't even ask you about the meaning. They just categorize.

**MG: Do you think that's particular to who or what you are, or is that just a general approach to teaching?**

HS: It's general.

SR: Cooper Union is about abstracting your work as much as possible.

HS: Yeah, and making yourself as misunderstood as possible, too.

**MG: Obscurity is close to godliness?**

HS: That's the way it seems.

**MG: Do you have references in your work that are particular to your being Latina?**

AP: No.

**MG: Or being a woman?**

AP: Yes, definitely. I'm a feminist, and that's what I write about in my work. I feel very strong about being a female artist. As females, we still have to break more chains. There's a lot of doors still closed for us, while the doors are always going to be open for guys. We still have to knock and knock, and sometimes the door won't even open.

LN: Especially being a minority woman.

AP: That's right! That's a fact I make a point of in my artwork. It comes out in my writing. Sometimes I get so depressed. In my sketchbook I have a female figure in ink captioned, "Let's put an end to art."

HM: We had an assignment: How do we feel about men? How feminist can we be? I did a collage which says, "Introducing a whole new area of disagreement for husbands," and at the bottom is a face that's half man and half dog.

AP: I tried to include my Dominican background and couldn't. I'd have to do research to really know where I came from and how rich my culture is. Later on I'm going to do that, because I'm interested.

LN: I made an attempt in a collage, a self-portrait. It being my first collage, some people thought it wasn't good, but I'll keep trying.

MH: I made the same attempt, but Marina didn't like it. It was about expressing time, Africans reaching a certain point. I have some difficulty placing myself because I am of different cultures. I still have problems relating myself to Spanish, Black, Greek, Indian. That's my background. I still have to go back and look into my history and ancestry.

“The point was to come here, get economically improved, and then leave, but nobody improves.”

**MG: Presuming most people in this room are younger than most people who will be contributing to or reading *Heresies*, do you perceive generational differences?**

HS: Definitely. Just the fact that my mother wasn't raised in New York. She comes from a certain social situation, and that role is imposed on me. I'm in New York in 1992, and she's so old-fashioned.

MH: You have to be home at a certain hour—

HIM: Not only a certain hour — like six o'clock!

**MG: It's still six o'clock?**

VH: 'Cause we're girls.

HIM: It's so obvious in my family; the preference.

VH: They let the guys stay out all night.

HM: The same story all the time.

**MG: And as parents, would you be different?**

HM: Of course.

AP: My mom is an open-minded woman. She's very strong, and I look up to her.

HM: Loud.

AP: Loud, too. I don't have any complaints about my parents. They're fabulous parents. But they're not encouraging my artwork. That's the only thing I would change. None of us would want our kids to go through what we are going through with our parents. It's really sad. We're going to try to be a better generation. But the minute you become a parent, everything changes. Now, without the experience, we're saying all this blah-blah-blah. We don't know!

**MG: What are your main concerns, the major issues confronting you?**

HS: I would like to say to everyone to understand the importance of origin. I think about culture. I don't know anything at all about mine.

LN: Me too.

HS: Also, I still can't let go of the idea of going back and living there.

AP: Can I ask you a question? Do you speak Spanish in your house?

HS: Yeah.

AP: Are your parents very strong Dominicans? They listen to merengue and everything?

HS: Yeah.

AP: How can you be a strong Dominican when you're away from your culture? I feel Americanized being here only six years, and I can picture how it is for you being here since you were four. But we still have these families, and they are so Dominican! My dad has a map of Dominican Republic framed in the living room, and my mom has a picture of Balaguer, the president, in her room. She loves him. She dresses in red on election day. But I'm Americanized. I don't look like a Dominican, don't dress like a Dominican, and my parents complain, but I don't see that I'm moving away from my culture.

HS: You see, if I go back today, I won't fit in. I been here too long. I can't change that.

AP: It happens to all of us. I won't go back to Dominican Republic; I know what's good for me. But I'm proud of being born there — and it's a good place to visit if you have dollars.

HS: That's what bothers me the most. I feel I should be able to stay there if I want.

AP: If you get a good job and make money, you'll end up buying a house there. Everybody does that.

HM: You can get used to it, same way you got used to here coming from over there. And once you start hanging out with, you know, guys with no socks—

HS: I don't know. I came really young, with less baggage.

**MG: Would she be accepted if she went back? Earlier we were talking about people who return home flashing cheap jewelry.**

**“Here you can go out with fifteen bucks; there you need three hundred to five hundred.”**

HM: She would be accepted. You go back there, everybody's Americanized, everybody knows English.

AP: You'll love it.

HS: I went back two years ago.

**MG: Did you feel comfortable?**

HS: No. I didn't want to leave, to come back here, but I didn't want to stay either.

**MG: Does anyone else want to “go home”?**

AP: I want to stay.

LN: I think I could live in Colombia for a couple of years, but I don't think I'd raise my children there.

MH: I'd love to go back.

**MG: What's keeping you here?**

MH: I don't want to stick with my parents. I want to do something for myself, to be far away.

HM: Here you can go out with fifteen bucks; there you need three hundred to five hundred. Man, when you find a McDonald's in Dominican Republic that has an under-99¢ menu, I'll go back there. Let me tell you, this is too good. No way I'm going to leave New York.

HS: The good thing is that over here you have a dollar; there it's thirteen pesos. You know how much it cost for a box of kotex, ten pads? Forty-eight pesos.

AP: Damn! You don't wish to be a woman every month. People are really poor. It's really hard to make it in Dominican Republic. You need connections.

HS: Or you got to know someone in the U.S.

SR: *Solo con tu mirada me dices todo lo que quisiera saber.*

**Technical assistance: Tai Lam Wong**

**Photography: John Paredes**

WE THE COLONIZED ONES  
BASTARDS OF SPAIN  
PROUD MESTIZOS,

WHITE AT HEART

Me,

Those who celebrate A History that lightened  
and darkened our faith

our SKIN

We,  
The colonized ones

Shall leave Away

shall leave a wound with no ember. These days  
was a mission.

of Self-Reflection

AND

# ITALY

# THROW THEM

INTO oblivion.

GRASP the MIRROR

THAT REFLECT OUR

AND Rub body AND

10

SELVES  
Soul  
IT.

0110

2. ILLUSION NEVER

1

we become

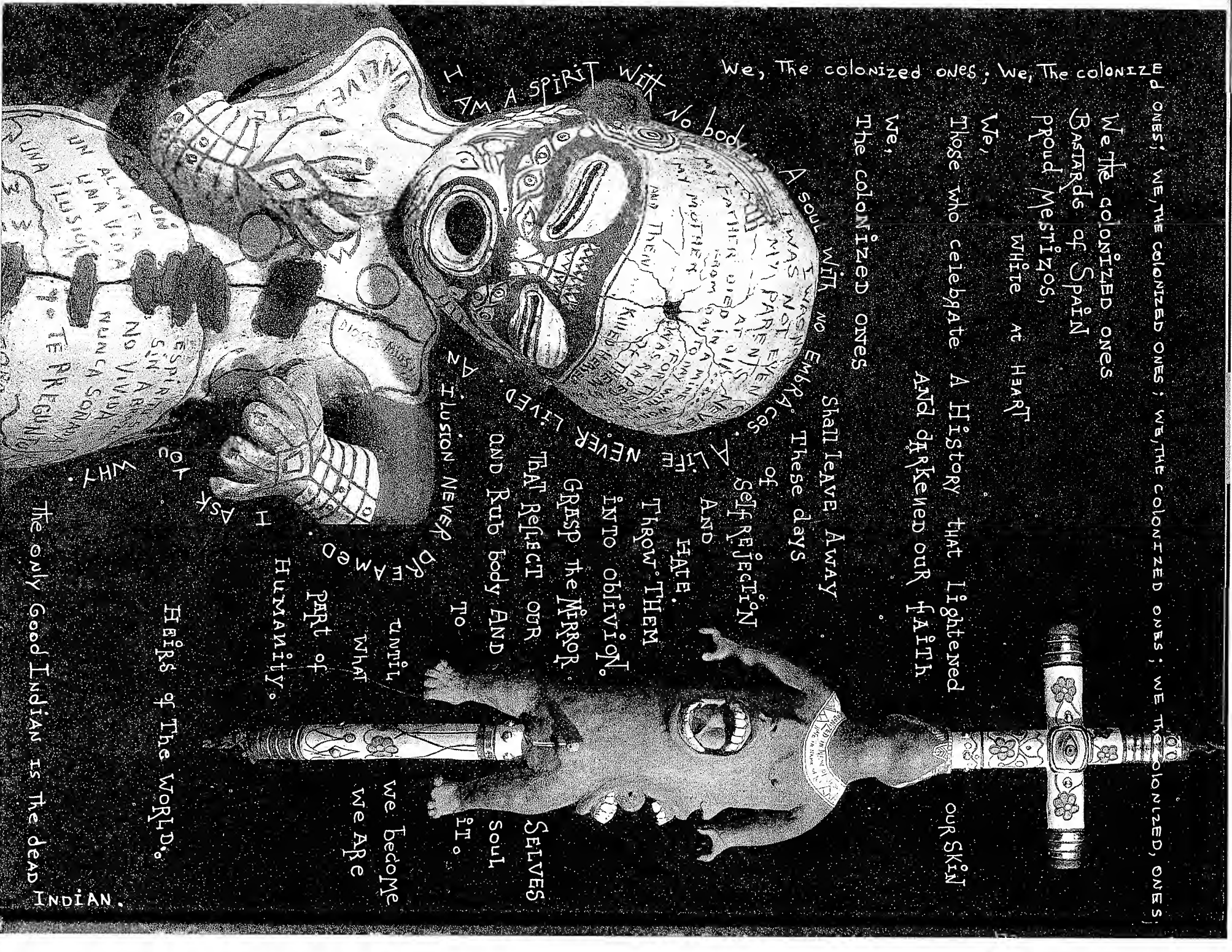
we Are

What  
part of

Humility.

Hairs of The World.

The only Good Indian is the dead Indian



we, the colonized ones.

AN HOMAGE  
TO OUR ANCESTORS  
AND TO THOSE OF US  
WHO HAVE  
STUBBORNLY  
SURVIVED  
500 YEARS  
OF  
VIOLENCE

KUKULI 1992

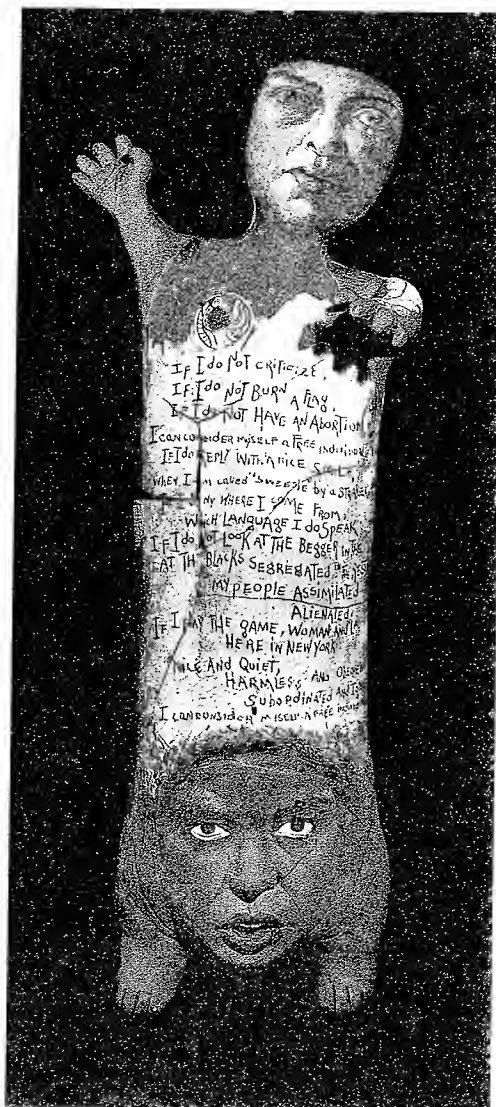


"If you refuse, Know That you will be  
constrained with fire and The sword, and  
all your Idols shall be overthrown,  
and We shall oblige you by The sword  
Abandon your false Religion and to receive  
willy-nilly our Catholic faith and pay  
Tribute to our emperor and deliver him  
your Kingdom. If you seek obstinately to  
Resist you may Rest Assured That God will  
suffer That you And all your Indians shall be  
destroyed by our Arms"

fray VICENTE de VALVERDE (S.XVI)

If I do not criticize  
If I do not burn a flag  
If I do not have an abortion  
I can consider myself  
a free individual.  
If I do reply  
with a nice smile  
When I am called "Sweetie"  
by a stranger  
If I deny where I come from  
which language I do speak  
If I do not look at  
the beggar in the train  
at the blacks segregated at  
the restaurant  
at my people . . . assimilated  
alienated  
If I play the game  
woman and "latina"  
here in New York  
nice and quiet  
harmless and obedient  
subordinated and ignorant  
I can consider myself  
a free individual.

KUKULI VELARDE



latinos,  
**What** hispanics...  
**hat**

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN THE U.S. **MARTHA E. GIMENEZ**

# next



I have always written for academic journals, and it is for me a pleasure to be able to express my ideas freely, without worrying about footnotes and ritualistic "reviews of the literature." While these views have been published elsewhere (see bibliography), they remain hidden from most of those who might find them personally and politically relevant. This is why I welcome the chance to contribute to this special issue of *Heresies*, for they will now reach many whose lives have been directly affected by the "Latino" and "Hispanic" labels, as well as many others whose politics have made them aware of the pitfalls inherent in identity politics at this time.

I became interested in these issues when I found out, some years ago, that I was included among the "minority faculty" in the university where I work. As I am a foreigner (I was born and grew up in Argentina and came to this country as an adult), I thought, naively, that the affirmative action office might have made a mistake. They informed me, orally as well as in writing, that I was a "Hispanic" and, therefore, they had the right to count me as a "minority." This was indeed a surreal and upsetting experience, first because of the racism entailed in the denial of my identity and the imposition of a spurious "Hispanicity" loaded with negative connotations, and also because of the administrative uses to which I was subject by becoming part of the statistics used to show compliance with the law. It was also absurd and even funny in a weird sort of way because, for anyone like myself, aware of the heterogeneity of the populations thrown together under the label, the idea is nonsensical, to say the least.

But this is no laughing matter, for labels have consequences and these became increasingly clear to

me as I began to search for critiques of the "Hispanic" label. I thought I would find plenty, for I mistakenly considered that the problems inherent in the label were obvious, but I was wrong: I found only a handful of articles which, critical of the "Hispanic" label, suggested that "Latino" was more historically and politically adequate. Upon reflection, I concluded that neither label was acceptable, for reasons I will outline as follows.

These labels are intended to identify a "minority group" — i.e., a group which the "majority" considers inferior, which has been historically oppressed for generations, and which, objectively, is socially rejected, economically excluded, and lacks political power. The invention of the "Hispanic" label erases the difference between the historically oppressed populations of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin and newly arrived immigrants from Central and South America. Moreover, it does not differentiate between those populations and people from Spain. Altogether this blurring of distinctions has many negative implications for members of local minorities, for arriving immigrants, and for the average American, whose relative ignorance about the world beyond U.S. boundaries is strengthened by labels that stereotype practically the entire world. The bombardment of the population with statistics that constantly stress the differences among whites, Asians, Blacks, and "Hispanics" as well as ethnic/racial politics and practices that minoritize everyone who is not from Europe must contribute to the strengthening of racial stereotypes and an oversimplified view of the world, especially among the very young, the uneducated, and the prejudiced, for whom the world might easily now appear to be populated primarily by minorities.

Both "Hispanic" and "Latino" carry contradictory meanings: *positive* when linked to culture (under-

**To posit  
some objective  
"Hispanicity"  
common to everyone  
remotely connected to  
Spain or born in a  
Spanish-speaking  
country is a  
state-imposed  
hegemonic project  
that culturalizes  
economic exploitation  
and political  
oppression.**

stood in terms of ways of life or as concrete artistic productions by, for example, minority leaders, educators, and politicians); and *negative* when placed in the context of what the mass media and the average person associate with them: drug abuse, low income, high incidence of AIDS, high fertility, school dropouts, criminal behavior, high rate of poverty, high proportion of families headed by women, large numbers of welfare recipients, and so on.

**L**et's examine the positive side first. In the context of the present politics of identity and public concern with multiculturalism, the labels are viewed by many, especially those in the intellectual and artistic elites, as sources of cultural pride. But exactly what are the major components of that all-encompassing culture they seem to have in mind? Which components of the culture should people be proud of? And whose culture? Mexican? Mexican American? Puerto Rican? Colombian? The culture of Spain? When traveling in Central and South America, I was struck with the differences between Argentina and the other countries; when I visited Spain and Italy, I was amazed at how much more at home I felt in Italy than in Spain. Divisions in terms of national origin, social class, ethnicity, race, length of stay in the U.S., and so forth make it exceedingly problematic to find common cultural denominators in this population beyond the language. And even the language itself divides, for each Latin American country has its own version of Spanish, which is itself divided by region, class, ethnicity, race, etc. Just as heterogeneous are the populations of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Spanish descent living in this country, in which the younger generations have at best a superficial knowledge of Spanish. Here one runs into a concept of culture as a thing that somehow should be preserved and passed on from one genera-

tion to the next. But culture is not a thing; it is the outcome of the lived experience of people, and it changes as that experience changes, subject to the processes that are constantly changing the society as a whole. To gloss over the living nature of culture, to posit instead some objective "Hispanicity" common to everyone remotely connected to Spain or born in a Spanish-speaking country while glossing over the historical cultural differences that divide this population, is a state-imposed hegemonic project that culturalizes economic exploitation and political oppression.

These populations and a large proportion of immigrants from Central and South America are where they are, politically and economically, not because of their "Hispanic" or "Latin" culture but because of their class location in the economic system. I would argue that, culturally, the labels distort reality and create false perceptions which deepen the ignorance of the average person about the "real" culture of these populations. For example, to throw together under the "Latino" or "Hispanic" label the cultural productions of Spain, Central and South America, the immigrants of those countries who live in the U.S., and the many different populations of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent who live in this country can yield only mystifications. It is as enlightening to say that Borges and Cervantes are "Hispanic" writers as it is to say that Shakespeare and Faulkner are "Anglo" writers.

When examining the negative side of labeling, the first thing to catch one's attention is that the labels hide more than they reveal. For instance, they hide the fact that a large proportion of these populations are of Native American and European descent. The labels perform neat tricks; they minoritize foreigners from Spanish-speaking countries (many of whom are of European descent), make Native Americans disappear under the pseudo-European veneer of "Hispanic," or

transform all "Latinos" into Native Americans because, as a Chicano scholar noted, the real reason why populations of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Spanish descent have been and continue to be historically subject to racist practices has nothing to do with their "Spanish" culture but with the fact that a large proportion had Native American blood. The minoritization of foreigners — especially of middle-class, professional, and technical workers — creates misleading evidence of progress in affirmative action recruiting. The minoritization of the brain drain of the Third World is legal because *all* the labels used to identify "minority" populations make no distinctions in class or national origin. While that might seem good, the implications for populations who have been excluded and oppressed for generations are far from desirable.

It is as  
enlightening  
to say that  
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as it is to say that  
**Shakespeare and**  
**Faulkner are**  
"Anglo" writers.

I cannot end without restating some of my personal views on these matters. This issue of *Heresies* was initially called "¡Viva Latina!" What I have written would seem to indicate my rejection of the "Latina" label. That would be a correct inference. It makes sense to me to consider myself, besides Argentine, Latin American. The labels "Latina/Latino" are, from my standpoint, adaptations to U.S.-imposed conditions of political discourse which disable rather than enable the populations so labeled. Why? Because, in the last instance, these ethnic/cultural labels are euphemisms for referring to important sectors of the U.S. working class. The kinds of political issues which concern the men and women who self-identify as "Latino/Latina" tend to be working-class issues, common to all working-class people regardless of cultural heritage or skin color: jobs, good wages, housing, schools, safety in the streets, health care, etc. But the politics of class has been silenced while the politics of identity flourishes. It has become legitimate to state



political claims only as members of ethnic/racial minorities or majorities, not in terms of class locations. As long as this situation is not challenged, these labels will continue to shape our perceptions, strengthening the racial/ethnic divisions among people and, therefore, strengthening racism itself. On the other hand, even though the "Latina" label does not resonate with me, personally I consider it more acceptable than "Hispanic," for it grapples with the historical links between people who, while living both north and south of the border between the U.S. and Latin America, do have a common history. The "Hispanic" label, on the other hand, seeks to obscure that history while stressing the links to the former colonizer, in fact granting the former colonizer cultural hegemony over its former subjects.

**U**ltimately, how we call ourselves is our own business, although whatever we do as individuals, we are powerless to change the way others label us. As a sociologist, I am aware that insofar as the politics of identity remain in command, critiques cannot change the status quo. Labels can be abolished only through political practices aimed at rejecting the victim status the system imposes upon people as the indispensable precondition for listening to their grievances. People, men and women, cannot at this time voice their grievances as workers but only as "victims" of their gender or their race or their ethnicity. In a process of reaction formation, people may embrace these victimized identities as banners of struggle, thus, for instance, positing "Latino" as against the state-created "Hispanic." But while there might be short-term gains in embracing these general identities that cut across class differences, class divisions have a way of reasserting themselves, as those individuals able to experience upward social mobility are then

**The politics of class  
has been silenced  
while the politics  
of identity flourishes.**



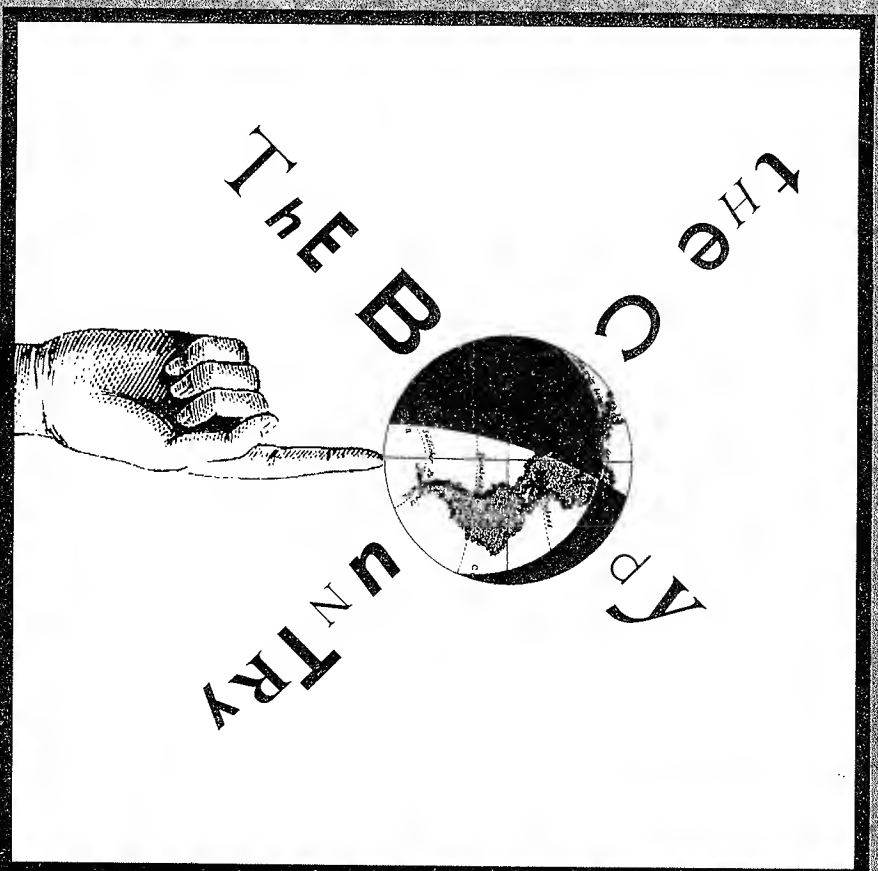
denounced, accused of having renounced their race, while they themselves do not understand why they are put down for their success. These contradictions should alert us to the need to be aware of the many meanings of culture so that we can differentiate culture as the expression of free creativity and self-expression from the culture that is the expression of state-imposed ethnicity or from the use of "Hispanic" as a code word to replace the "culture of poverty" standby explanation of the effects of social exclusion and economic exploitation.

In the end, clarity about the sources of common grievances, needs, and aspirations matters more than labels. When such clarity is achieved, we are likely to realize that unity and strength can emerge more quickly from the frank recognition of differences than from the often instrumental adoption of panethnic identities.

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EDITED BY JOSELY CARVALHO



MARINA GUTIÉRREZ

CECILIA VICUÑA & MAY STEVENS

JOSELY CARVALHO

ANA MENDIETA

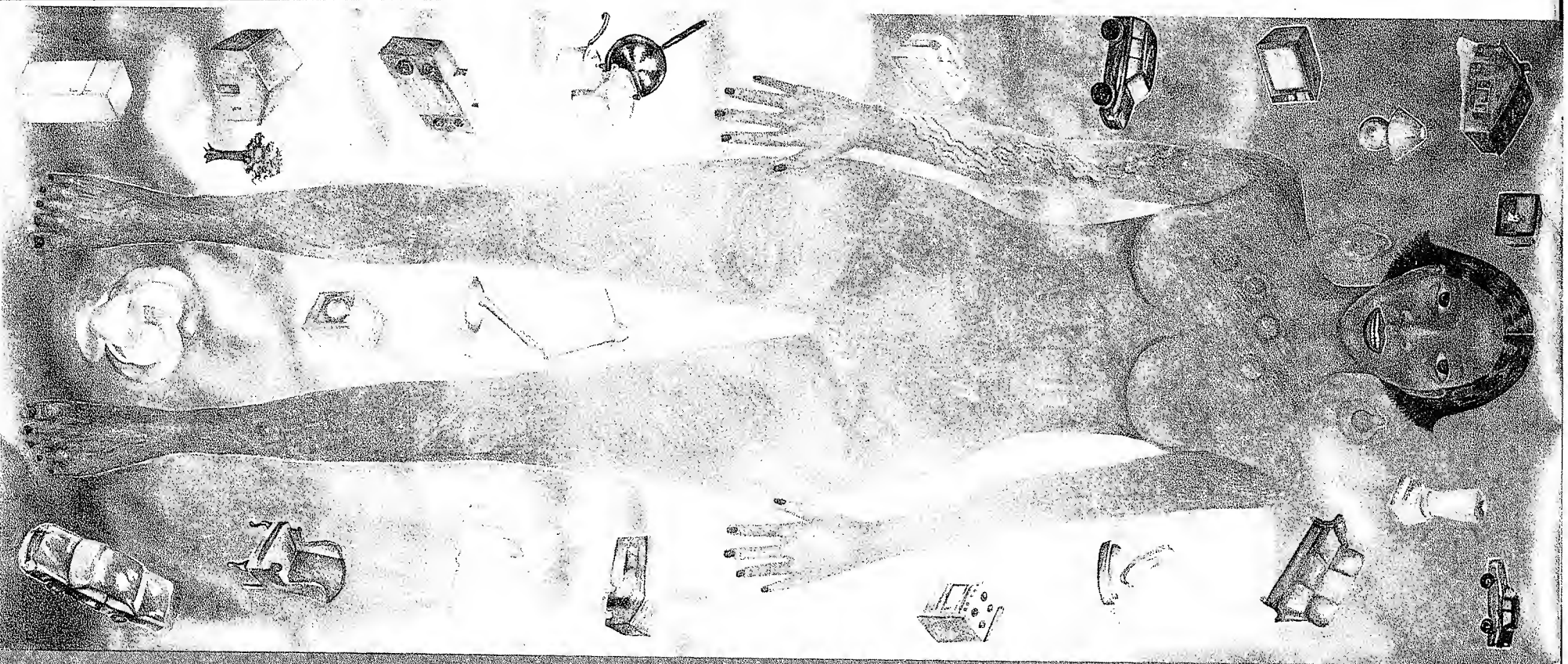
## MARINA GUTIÉRREZ

Approaching the Border, I always carry a passport, since the slightest deviation from the imagined norm can require documentation. In the middle of the desert a 6.5" Chicano "Migra" officer halts the bus. Surveying passengers through mirrored sunglasses, he stands over me.

"Nationality?" Speaking english like a chameleon, I answer in the voice of the blond bible-college student next to me, "American!" (Speaking spanish to avoid confusion or higher prices, I dream in languages I've never spoken.)

In foreign countries my American passport occasions questions of identity, where I am *really* from. I answer, "From America [for 39 years, 80 years, 500 years, thousands of years, from the bodies of my ancestors, the ocean and the planet Earth!]"

But in Egypt I recognize myself on the ceilings of tombs and temples. The same arms, hair, belly — "Mute, sky goddess birthing and consuming the days. Recognizing myself, I invite Mute into the present, an American Mute/me. She enters America, and I think of the U.S. border littered with manufactured dreams, I mix metaphors, I paint the golden sky of Christian deluges filled with the airplanes of 1993—a beginning of the next 500 years.



LEFT:

Marina Gutierrez

*Min. with Applique*, 1993

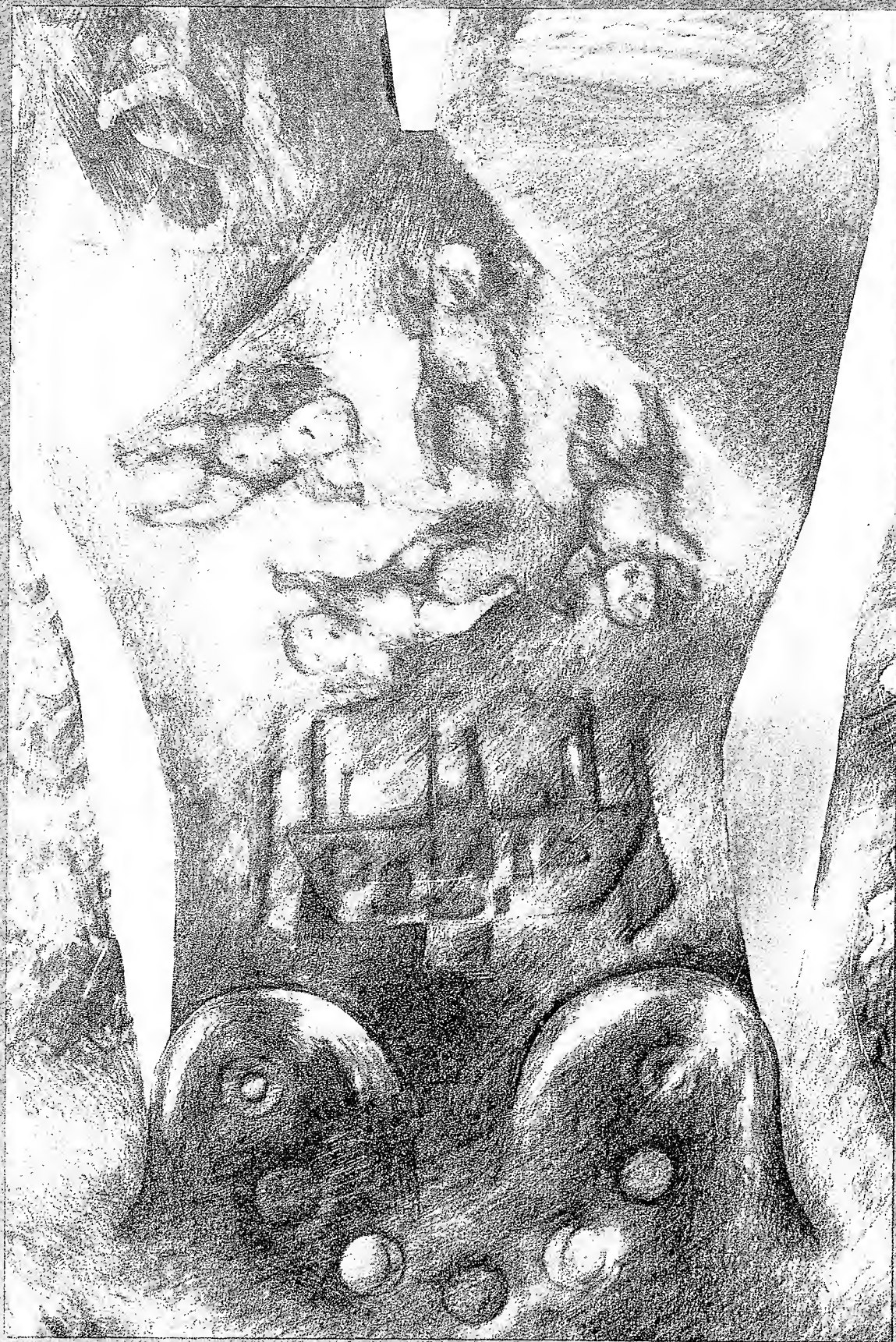
metallic pencil rubbing & acrylic on paper, 6 x 13

RIGHT:

Marina Gutierrez

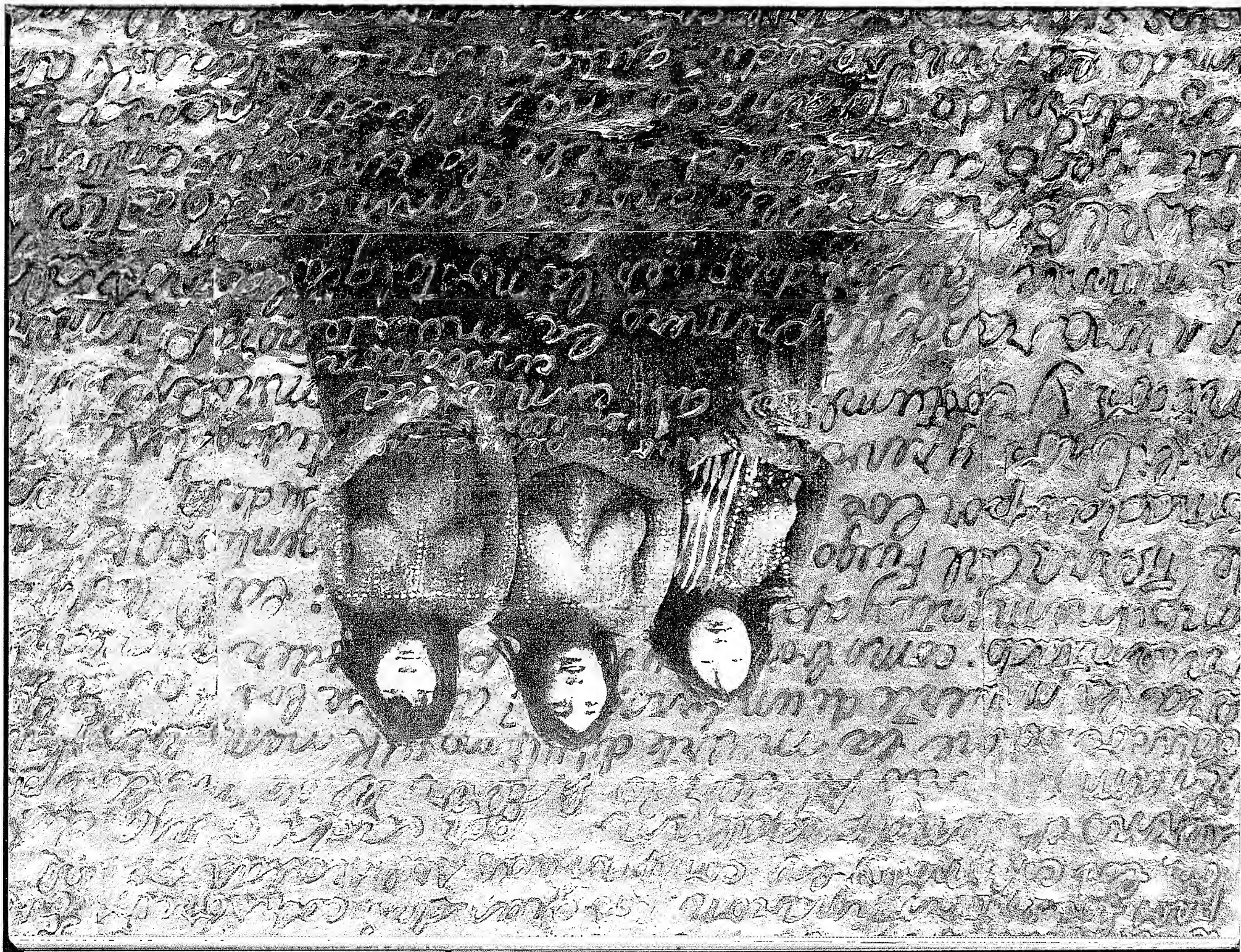
*Min. with Stars* (detail), 1993

pencil rubbing & acrylic on paper, 6 x 13



CHILANS, ARGENTINES AND EUROPEANS ESTABLISHED THEM.  
THE INTERNATIONAL SHEEP-BREEDING CORPORATIONS, THE  
COLONIZERS AND COMPANIES SUBSIDIZED BY THE GOVERN-  
MENT OF CHILE PAID \$1 FOR EACH ONE OF A SELK'NAM.  
I REMEMBER READING IN THE NEWSPAPERS ABOUT THE  
DEATH OF THE LAST SELK'NAM - A BEGGAR, A TUMBLER,  
AN IDLER, FOR THAT WAS HOW THEY WERE REPRESENTED  
IN ORDER TO KILL THEM WITH IMPUNITY AND STEAL THEIR LAND;  
THE GREAT ISLAND OF TIERMA DEL FUEGO .  
THE LAST PHOTOS OF THE SELK'NAM, TAKEN BY M. GUZMÁN AND  
OTHERS TO DOCUMENT THEIR DISAPPEARANCE, NOW APPEAR  
IN BOOKS AND MAGAZINES .  
NOW WE THANKABOUT THEM AND WE STUDY THEIR RITES,  
THEIR MYTHS, THEIR CUSTOMS .  
THIS IS THE WAY IT IS WITH OUR CIVILIZATION, FIRST WE  
ENHANCE A RACE, A CULTURE, THEN WE COMMUNICATE  
IT .  
THE SELK'NAM RECOVERED THEIR DEL FUEGO BY FOOT  
WHEN THE ICE STILL COVERED THE CONTINENT. THEY  
WERE HUNTERS, NOT BUILDERS OF BOATS. WHEN THE  
ICE RECESSED THEY REMAINED ISOLATED AND LIVED  
ALONE ON THEIR ISLAND FOR 3000 YEARS .  
THEIR MYTHS AND RITUALS, THEIR LANGUAGE AND SPIRITUAL  
WORLD GREW MORE AND MORE COMPLEX AND ELABORATE,  
BUT THEIR MATERIAL LIFE REMAINED THE SAME .  
THEY WENT NAKED, BARELY COVERING THEMSELVES  
WITH THE BELT OF THE GUAYACO .  
THE MAN HUNTED, THE WOMEN SWAM IN THE ICE WATERS  
GATHERING SHELLFISH .  
THE MAN SAID THAT ONCE WOMEN RULED THE WORLD,  
AND ONLY THROUGH CUNNING WERE MEN ABLE TO FREE  
THEMSELVES FROM DOMINATION. ALWAYS FEARFUL THAT  
WOMEN WOULD REGAIN THEIR POWER, THE MEN KEPT  
THEM SUBJUGATED AND TERRORIZED THROUGH GREAT  
CEREMONIAL RITUALS IN WHICH EVERYONE PAINTED THEIR  
BODIES AND ASSUMED THEIR ROLES IN THE ORIGINAL  
BATTLE .  
IN THEIR MYTHS, KUMAYU, THE SELK'NAM HERO, INTRODUCED  
DEATH ON EARTH SO THAT PEOPLE WOULD NOT HAVE TO RETURN  
TO EARTH AGAIN ALL THE REMEMBERED EVILS .  
DEATH WOULD PUT AN END TO THE UNSTOPPABLE ACCUMULATION  
OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD .  
BUT THE DEATH OF A CULTURE ?

CUBIENDO, ARREBAJANDO Y BARRIENDO LOS ENTERRAMIENTOS.  
 LOS GRANDES CONSIDEROS QUE ELLOS, LOS COLONES Y LAS  
 COMPAÑIAS EMPLEADAS POR EL GOBIERNO CHILENO HAN  
 AGRAVADO LA PENA QUE LA SEÑALAN EN EL MUNDO.  
 EL GOBIERNO HA SIDO ELLOS REPROBADO, PORQUE LA  
 MUJER DEL SEÑALAN UN BARRIDO, UN BARRIDO,  
 UN BARRIDO, ASÍ SE LOS HA BARRIDO, PARA  
 PODER MANTENER IMPULSIONES Y APOYARSE EN SU  
 TIERRA: LA ISLA GRANDE DE TIERRA DEL PUERTO.  
 AHORA LAS ÚLTIMAS FORMAS DE LA SEÑALAN EN LAS  
 FORMAS, QUE SON Y OTROS QUE DOCUMENTAN EN DESA-  
 PARECIDO, APARECEN EN LIBROS Y REVISTAS.  
 AHORA PENSAMOS QUE LOS Y ESTUDIAMOS SUS RITOS,  
 RITOS Y COSTUMBRES.  
 ASÍ ES NUESTRA CIVILIZACIÓN, PRIMERA EXTENSIÓN UNA RAZA,  
 UNA CULTURA Y DESPUÉS LA OTRA.  
 LOS SEÑALAN LLEGARON CAMINANDO A TIERRA DEL PUERTO,  
 CUANDO TODAVÍA EL HIELO AL CONTINENTE, CAYÓ  
 CAZADORES, NO NAVIGANTES. CUANDO EL HIELO RECEDÍO  
 QUEDARON AISLADOS Y AHÍ VIVIERON SOLOS DURANTE  
 8000 AÑOS.  
 SUS RITOS Y COSTUMBRES RURALES, SU LENGUA Y MUNDO,  
 ESPIRITUAL CRECIÓ EN COMPLEJIDAD Y ELABORACIÓN,  
 PERO SU CULTURA MATERIAL SEGUÍA SIEMPRE IGUAL.  
 LES GUSTABA ANDAR DESPUÉS, CUBRIENDO APUÑAS CON  
 UNA PIEL DE GUAYACO.  
 LOS HOMBRES CASABAN, LAS MUJERES NADABAN EN LAS  
 AGUAS HELADAS PARA MAIZORAR.  
 LOS HOMBRES DECÍAN QUE ANTES LAS MUJERES DOMINABAN  
 EL MUNDO, Y QUE SOLO MEDIANTE SU ASISTENCIA LOS HOMBRES  
 SE HAN LIBERADO DE ESA DOMINACIÓN.  
 SIEMPRE TEMEROSOS DE QUE ELAS RECUPERARAN SU PODER,  
 LAS SOJUZGABAN Y ATERRORIZABAN CON GRANDES RITOS  
 COLECTIVOS, EN LOS QUE TODO EL MUNDO SE PUNTABA Y  
 ASUMÍA SU ROL EN LA BATALLA ORIGINAL.  
 EN SUS MITOS, KWANYIR, EL REDE SEÑALAN, INTRODUJO  
 LA MUJER SOBRE LA TIERRA PARA ENTRAR QUE LA SEÑAL  
 REGENERARA ESTRECHAMENTE E HICIERA REGENERAR PARA  
 SIEMPRE LOS MALOS RECUERDOS.  
 LA MUJER ENTABLA QUE SE ACUMULABA UN CONOCIMIENTO  
 EXAGERADO SOBRE LAS COSAS DEL MUNDO.  
 LA MUJER DEL INDIVIDUO, PERO? LA MUJER DE LA  
 COMUNIDAD?





MY BODY IS MY COUNTRY

## Constitution

A body belongs only to the individual. The state takes no claim on bodies or spirits.

The body may be represented, painted, photographed, and shown in its parts or totality with full knowledge of the party.

The individual may not be denigrated, raped, tortured, starved, discriminated or censored.

Each individual has the right to choose health care, education, food, housing, clothing and the right to die.

No special value is placed on language, color, race, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender, class or ideology.

Individuals may create their own flag. It may be cherished, burned, torn, idealized, re-invented, patched, loved, hated. The flag's function is aesthetic.

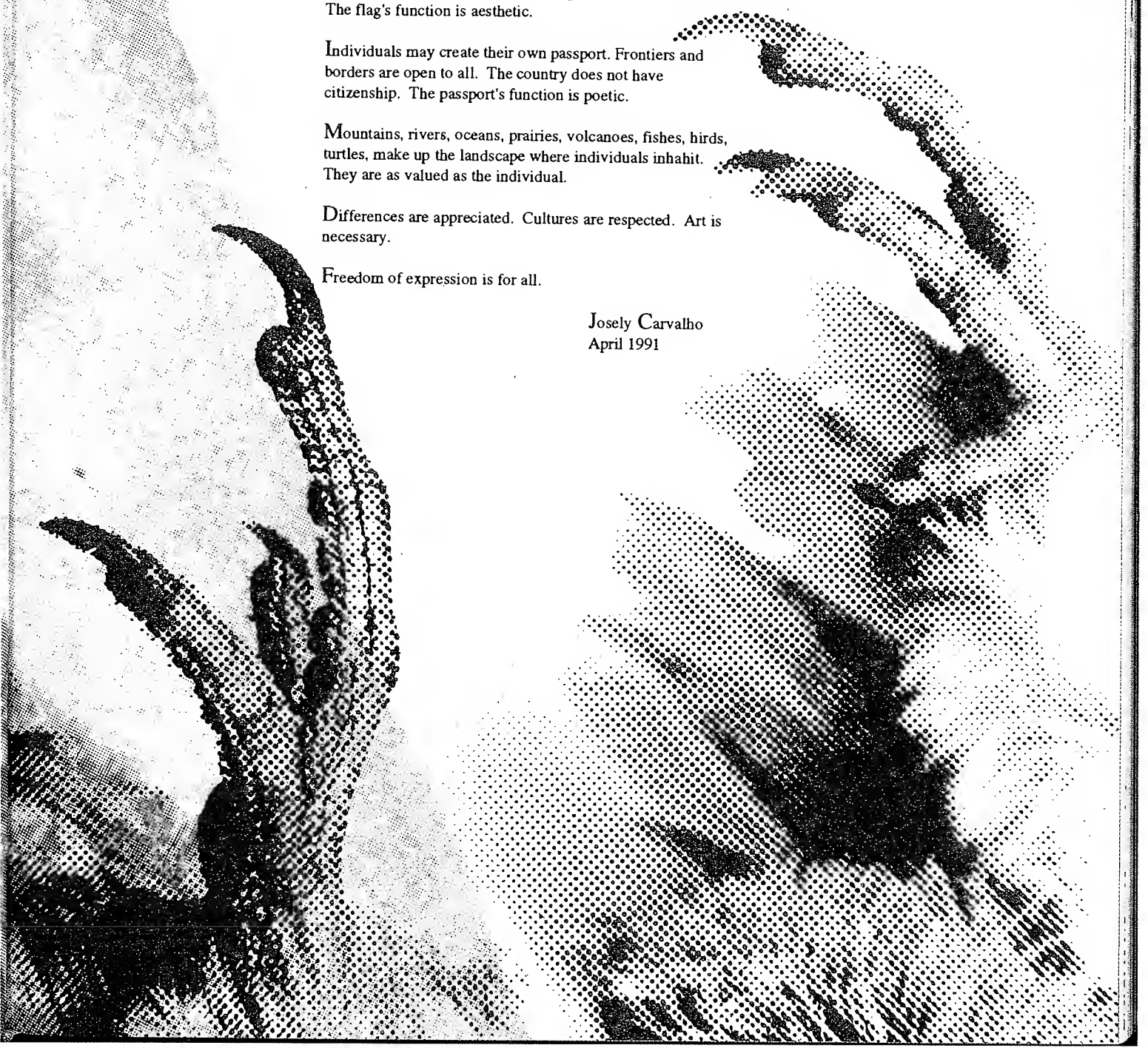
Individuals may create their own passport. Frontiers and borders are open to all. The country does not have citizenship. The passport's function is poetic.

Mountains, rivers, oceans, prairies, volcanoes, fishes, birds, turtles, make up the landscape where individuals inhabit. They are as valued as the individual.

Differences are appreciated. Cultures are respected. Art is necessary.

Freedom of expression is for all.

Josely Carvalho  
April 1991







TOP LEFT

Ana Mendieta

untitled, state II (Rapastron series), 1982  
photo-etching, 10" x 7"

Photo: Galerie Leirong, N.Y.

BOTTOM LEFT

Ana Mendieta

Guanabacoa (Rapastron series), 1982  
photo-etching, 10" x 7"

Photo: Galerie Leirong, N.Y.

ABOVE

Ana Mendieta

Isla Sibuet series, 1979  
photograph documenting earth-body work, Iowa City, 13 1/4" x 20"

Photo courtesy Raquel Mendieta

# COLLECTION

CURATED BY THE LATINA COLLECTIVE

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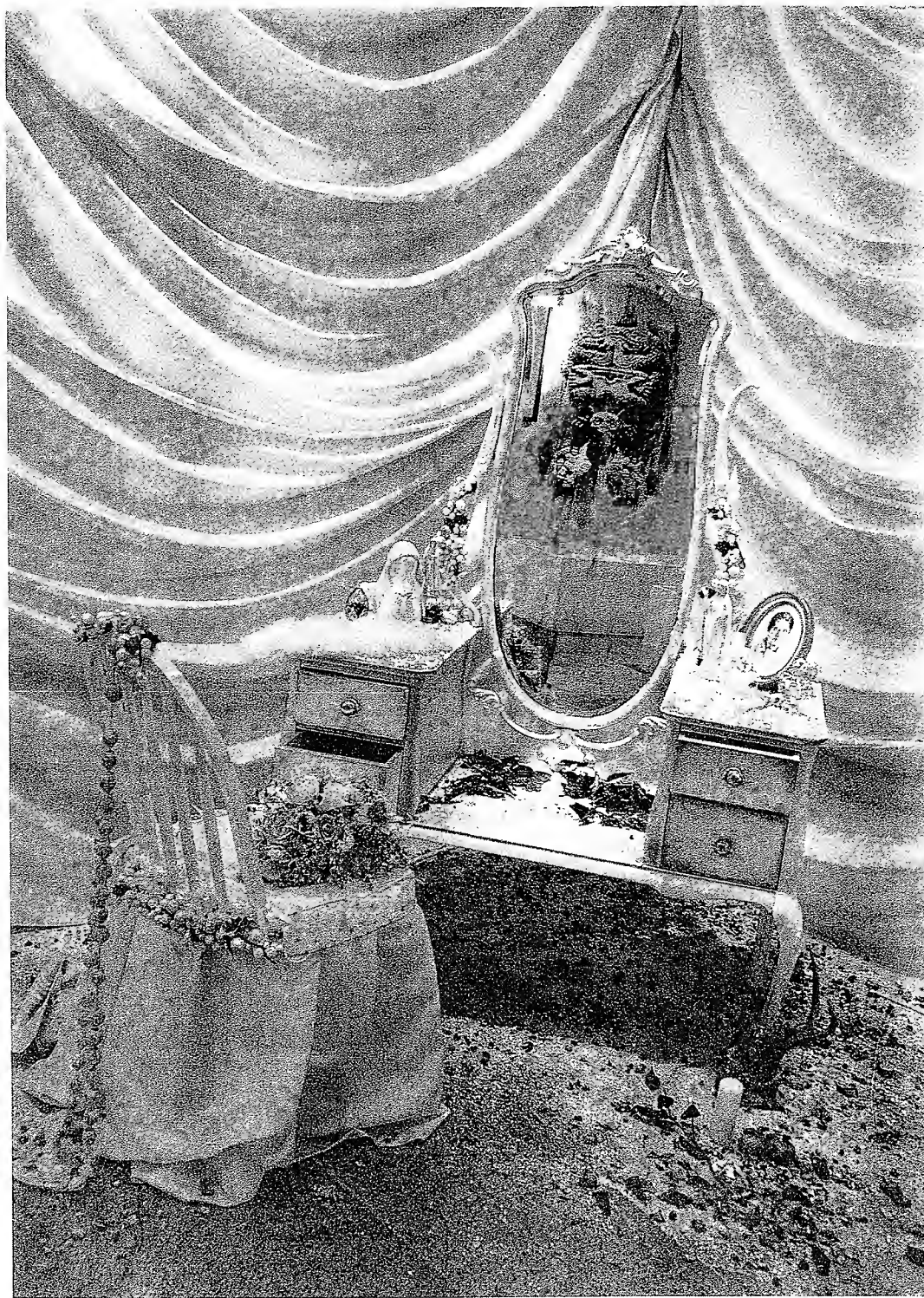
FRANCES NEGRÓN-MUNTANER 72

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## AMALIA MESA-BAINS



### Amalia Mesa-Bains

*Venus Envy Chapter One (or, The First Holy Communion—Moments Before the End)*, 1993

Detail: *Coatlicue in the Vanity*.

Photo: George Hirose.



Santa Barraza  
from the *Codice de corazón sagrado* series, 1992.

LILIANA PORTER

Liliana Porter

*The Way Around*, 1989  
photograph, 8" x 10"



"The way around", 1989

Liliana Porter



Sophie Rivera  
*Woman & Child, n.d.*  
photograph.

SOPHIE RIVERA

## WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

Recently I was asked by a corporate marketing representative to recommend contemporary "Hispanic" artists who create "ethnic looking" art. I suppose I should not have been surprised that such attitudes toward Latino artists still persist. As Edward Sullivan has pointed out, there is a pervasive notion among North Americans that Latin American culture is monolithic and easily identifiable by stereotypical traits such as "bright color, irrationality, violence, magic, [and] fantasy." Much debate has centered around exhibitions such as *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987*, organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1987, and *Hispanic Artists in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, which originated at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts in 1988. Both exhibitions have been criticized for resorting to some of the stereotypical notions listed above.

MIRIAM BASILIO

## GLADYS TRIANA



**Gladys Triana**

*Path to the Memory: 1492-1992, 1992*  
handmade paper, wood, nails, powdered pigments  
37" x 49" x 5".

## POSITIVE SPIN : LATINA ARTISTS RESPOND TO GHETTOIZATION

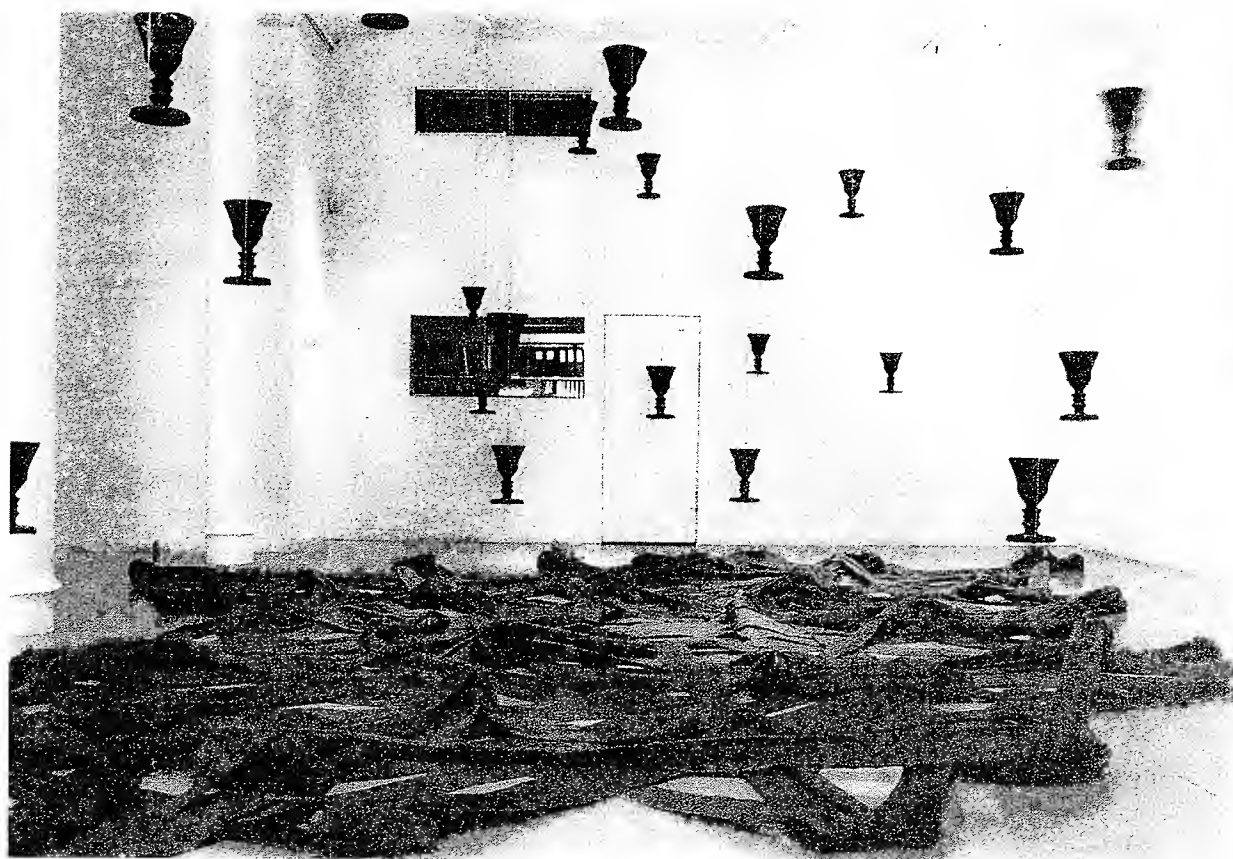
The artworld's systematic exclusion of Latina artists from the mainstream manifests itself in the common practice of labeling—using terms such as *Hispanic*, *other*, or *marginal*, which seek only to demean Latina culture, art, and origin. These terms obscure how Latinas view ourselves and how others view our culture. Yet the negative reinforcement of this ghettoization by those who have fallen victim to this terminology has created a foundation for addressing collective struggles and viewpoints, thereby strengthening rather than weakening artists. Women artists of diverse backgrounds have formed coalitions that may not have come together otherwise, creating, in effect, a common goal. Ghettoization has motivated artists to confront oppressive forces and take action.

Coast to Coast: National Women Artists of Color (founded in 1987) and Vistas Latinas (founded in 1989) are examples of women artists coming together for support, encouragement, and empowerment.

CLAUDIA HERNÁNDEZ

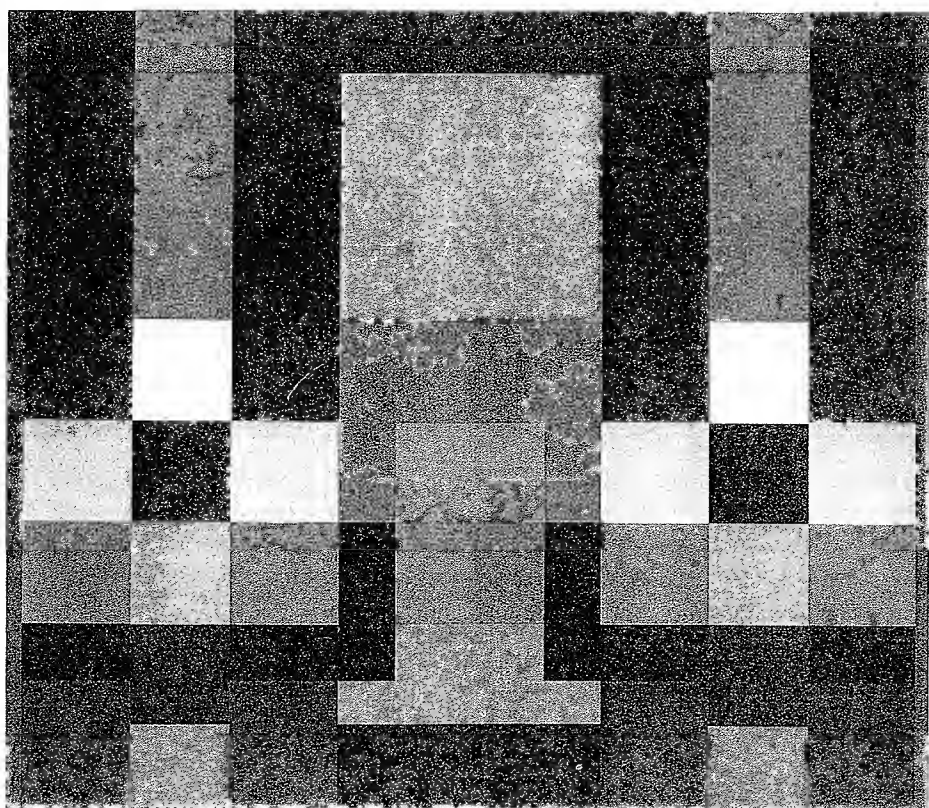
Individual empowerment derives from politicized community awareness, and within the diversity of these groups, barriers between individuals' backgrounds can be addressed. Coast to Coast and Vistas Latinas have organized and participated in shows that address categorization, dispelling stereotypes through the diversity of their work. Such situations allow artists to accurately represent and identify themselves, to "feel a unique freedom to put forth the positive inside me," as one artist put it.

Though the challenge for Latina artists to define their individualities in the face of ghettoization is now being met, this should not mislead us into believing that the forces we fight against are not also implanted within ourselves. We must prevent ourselves from doing to each other what the mainstream continues to do to us. The drawbacks of getting caught up in labeling and stereotyping are too significant to overlook. Latina artists need to continue to work together to educate and reinforce one another, examining critically how ghettoization is perpetuated, in the hope of ultimately changing what the mainstream is unwilling to change.

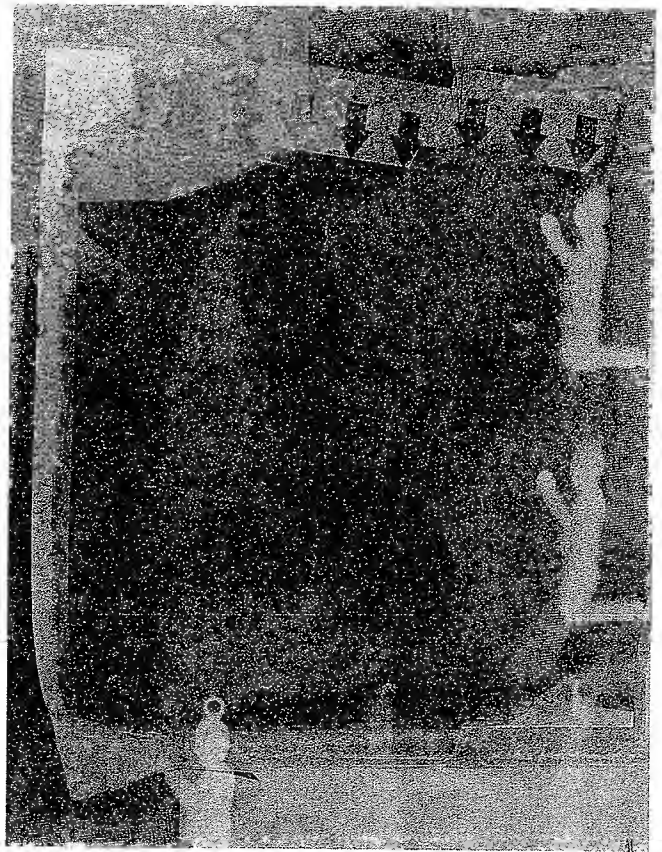
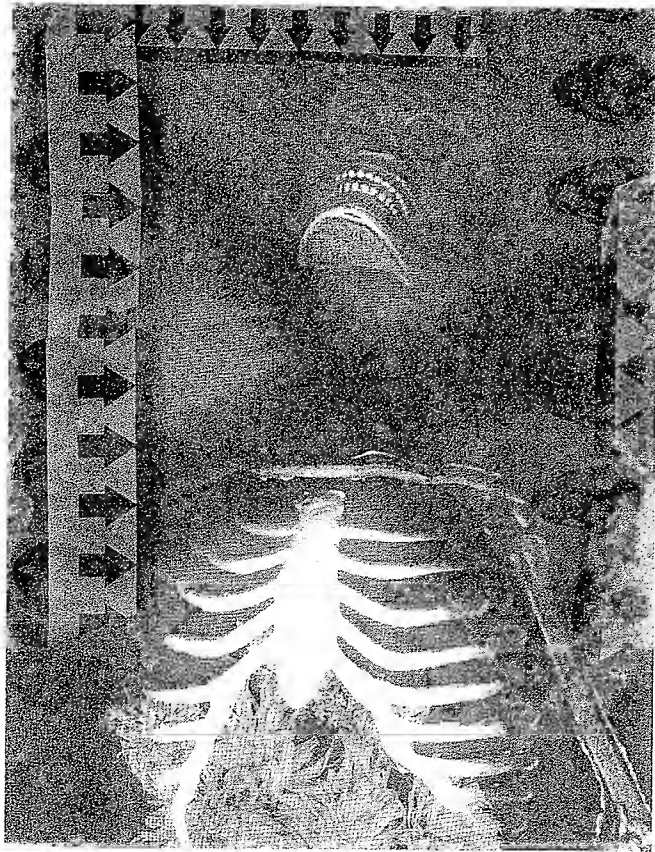


Ana Linnemann *Nomad*, 1993 cast goblets, water, steel wool, shoes, cement. Photo: Pat Kilgore.

Fanny Sanin  
Study for Painting No. 8, 1981  
acrylic, 15 x 17 cms.





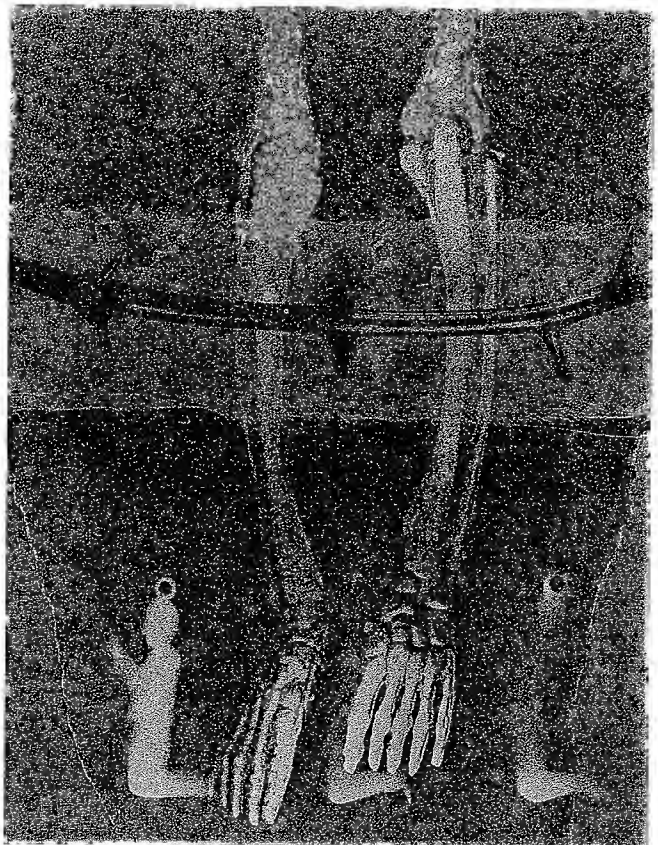


## KATHY VARGAS

This series began as a remembrance of two friends who died of AIDS. One loved Day of the Dead; the other had met his mate on Valentine's Day. Their two favorite days seemed unfortunately "appropriate" to AIDS: to die from love.

At the time each was dying, I sent some *milagros* to their mates, all of us praying for a miracle to save their lives.

But the miracle never came. After their death the prayers for them became transformed to prayers recited to them for the lives of others still awaiting miracles.



Kathy Vargas

*Oración: Valentine's Day/Day of the Dead series, 1990-91*  
hand-colored photographs, 24" x 20".

THE TREE OF LIFE

I wish you to learn what I have to say  
 I bring from faraway other spaces  
 which  
 I learned with the "poorest" of my people

They know very well  
 the Design of precariousness

For me it is the "tradition"  
 to learn from he who knows from NATURE,

the "pragmatical"  
 the "magical"  
 the "philosophical"  
 ways.

Since childhood I learned to respect this strength.

Some Artists of my land seem to have this ambition  
 to Refine and  
 to translate into  
 the universal

this genuine philosophy:

a humble wisdom which is there

pulsing at the surface  
 underneath the skin.

Contaminating everyone,

Perhaps, because taken for granted  
 who is developing it is so invisible,  
 the "Underdeveloped" ones,

who already have so little.

All they have is this intense contact  
 with NATURE's  
 way,

with the way the angle is built  
 the distance is felt,  
 with the way the space is shared  
 the smells inhaled.

It is the intention "in" the content  
that brings organic invention  
to wor(1)ds and shapes.

It is what is daily SEEN, LISTENED, PERFORMED by

this "Tree of anonymous faces"  
that recycles the Air which

We all breathe  
breed  
and brew

HIGH ENERGY

WHICH I experienced only rarely

in few other places on  
Earth.

ENERGY that inspires 'mythological hope'  
and 'generosity without questions'...

We, the artists of our land,

we know WHAT we learned from them.

And giants, as giants  
like Joyce and Mallarmé,

transubstantiated this knowledge into the best wine.

Guimarães Rosa

Glauber Rocha

José Celso Martines Correia

Hélio Oiticica

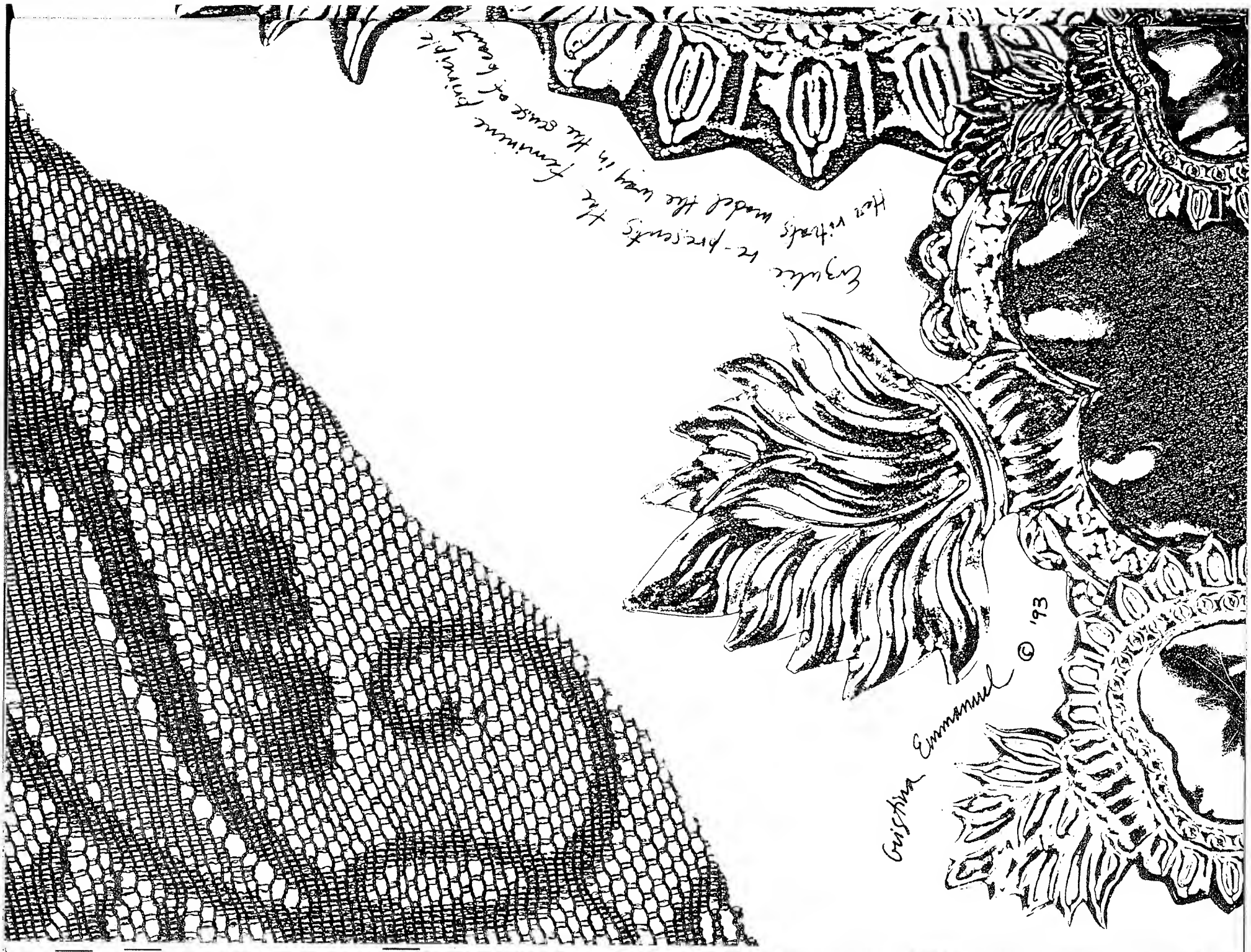
.....

But who cares for these names?

Do you know

that in Brazil we speak Portuguese?

Regina Vater - Austin, February 1987



Engle  
re-presents the  
Her who's model the way in the case of  
feminine principle

Christina Emmanuel © '93

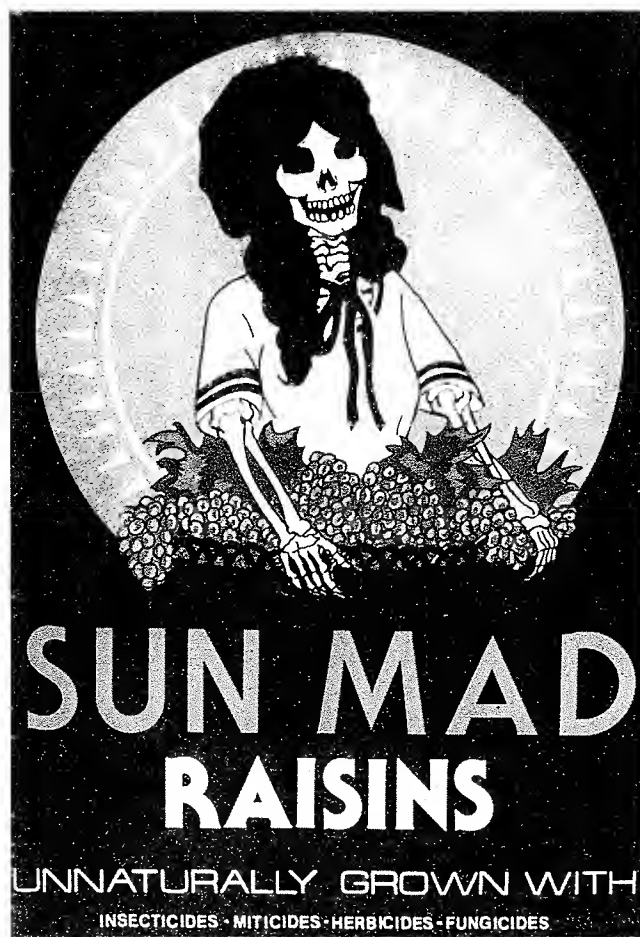


## JUANA ALICIA

Juana Alicia

*La ponkalavera güera*, 1984  
silkscreen on rag paper, 26" x 40".

Photo: Marvin Collins.



Ester Hernández

*Sun Mad*, © 1983  
screenprint, 17" x 22".

ESTER HERNÁNDEZ

## OR EM US

Padre nuestro  
que estás en el norte  
santificado sea tu dólar  
que nos llega  
con tus préstamos.  
Hágase tu voluntad  
así en el sur  
como en el centro.

El pan nuestro  
del próximo siglo  
danos hoy  
y perdónanos  
la deuda externa  
para seguir explotando  
a nuestros deudores.  
No nos dejes caer  
en revolución.  
Garantízanos la paz.

Amén.

## ILEANA FUENTES

### PATER NOSTER

Padre  
(de ellos; nuestro, no)  
Patricio  
Patriarca  
Patria  
(potestad,  
que viene de poder,  
que es de ellos; nuestro, no)  
Patrimonio  
Patriarcado  
Patria  
Patriota  
Patriotismo  
(para otros; nuestro, no)  
El gran silencio hormonal  
que no recoge la historia  
(su historia  
de ellos; nuestra, no)  
Patricidio  
(sua culpa  
sólo de ellos; nuestra, no).

## PATER FAMILIAS

Apellido  
sinónimo de padre  
marcando la identidad  
cual frágil virtud  
o defecto congénito.  
Apellido  
cómplice ajeno a su complicidad  
con el exterminio milenario.  
A fin de cuentas  
mi apellido  
— el de mi padre, a quien amo —  
fue también el de mi abuelo,  
el de su padre de él  
el del padre  
de su padre  
de su padre  
trillonada de espermas  
que por vía de mi padre  
(a quien amo, y no culpo)  
me preceden.

Apellido  
sinónimo de padre  
envoltura indespellejable,  
que aún si fuera de mi madre  
no sería sino el de mi otro abuelo  
que también fue de su padre  
y del padre  
de su padre  
de su padre  
trillonada de espermas  
que por vía de mi madre  
(a quien amo y compadezco)  
me preceden.

Orgullo  
Autoridad  
Herencia  
Tribu  
Familia  
Clan

Desposeídas de la historia  
lo propio e imborrable  
es la sangre coagulada  
que acaricia nuestras piernas  
y la abnegada vocación  
de parir apellidos  
del padre  
del padre  
del padre  
de otro padre.

## IMAGES — LATINA STYLE

Brace yourself. Witness flickering images of street fights superimposed on silent waters, rose-colored from sidewalk bloodstains, sweeping from iridescent hydrants. This is not a television picture. These are indelible childhood memories. I remember seeing my best friend, Daisy, jump from a fifth-floor window to escape her father's beatings. I remember having my head forced down into a running toilet bowl by school gang members. Still with me?

Sociology 101 this is not. Ironically, though, it seems to have worked for some of us. Being raised in "el barrio" has its positive effects as well as its horrors. Perhaps it provides an unambiguous sense of day-to-day existence, and the edge begets an uneasy sort of strength, locking us unsuspectingly into survival mode. I remember at times having to "switch channels" while out in the streets. Consequently, to this day I am acutely aware of the existence of primal instinct.

Today when I'm asked when I first sensed I wanted to be an artist, I answer, "When I stole my first and last box of crayons at the age of six." My memory projects a dark staircase

juxtaposed with fluorescent colors; as in a movie scene, a child's foot appears, anxiously reaching for the next step up. Her father, moving in slow motion, extends his hand to catch the scattering crayolas tumbling from the little girl's under-pants. The child cries and pleads. The images clear . . .

My father resolved the problem of the stolen crayons by having my younger brother, Roberto, take the blame and return them to the bodega the very same day. The feelings of pain, shame, and guilt still linger, particularly because Roberto passed away approximately six weeks later.

A mother's piercing shriek stopping a would-be kidnapper of a five-year-old contrast with the joyful recognition of my artistic skills by a fifth-grade teacher, setting up blurred divisions of focus in my mind.

Undoubtedly these bewildering beginnings have fueled my art making and supplied me with a rich well of ideas. One comes to mind: the painful depiction of the scarred self in the painting of a young girl kneeling on a punctured metallic grater, with the words "ugliest knees in 5th grade" scrawled on the dark canvas. Lisa Steinberg comes to mind.

Quick — switch channels.

## PURA CRUZ

### ADAM—1999 & FAST FORWARD

My earlier series, entitled *Rituals*, concerned itself with shamanistic practices I experienced personally in my early youth. Ironically, the series *Adam—1999* definitively propelled me into the futuristic future, carrying me from personal history to public history.

Creating as well as seeing art involves examining our own prejudices and preconceptions. The theme of male birth evidently hits hard against these preconceptions. At slide lectures, the men in the audience distinctly groan when I have stated the following:

*One astonishing development that will probably occur in this decade is for a few men to experience pregnancy personally. A California biologist predicts that by the end of the 1990s men will be able to have an artificially inseminated egg attached to the intestine, carry a fetus, and deliver by cesarean section. Experiments have already begun in Australia.*

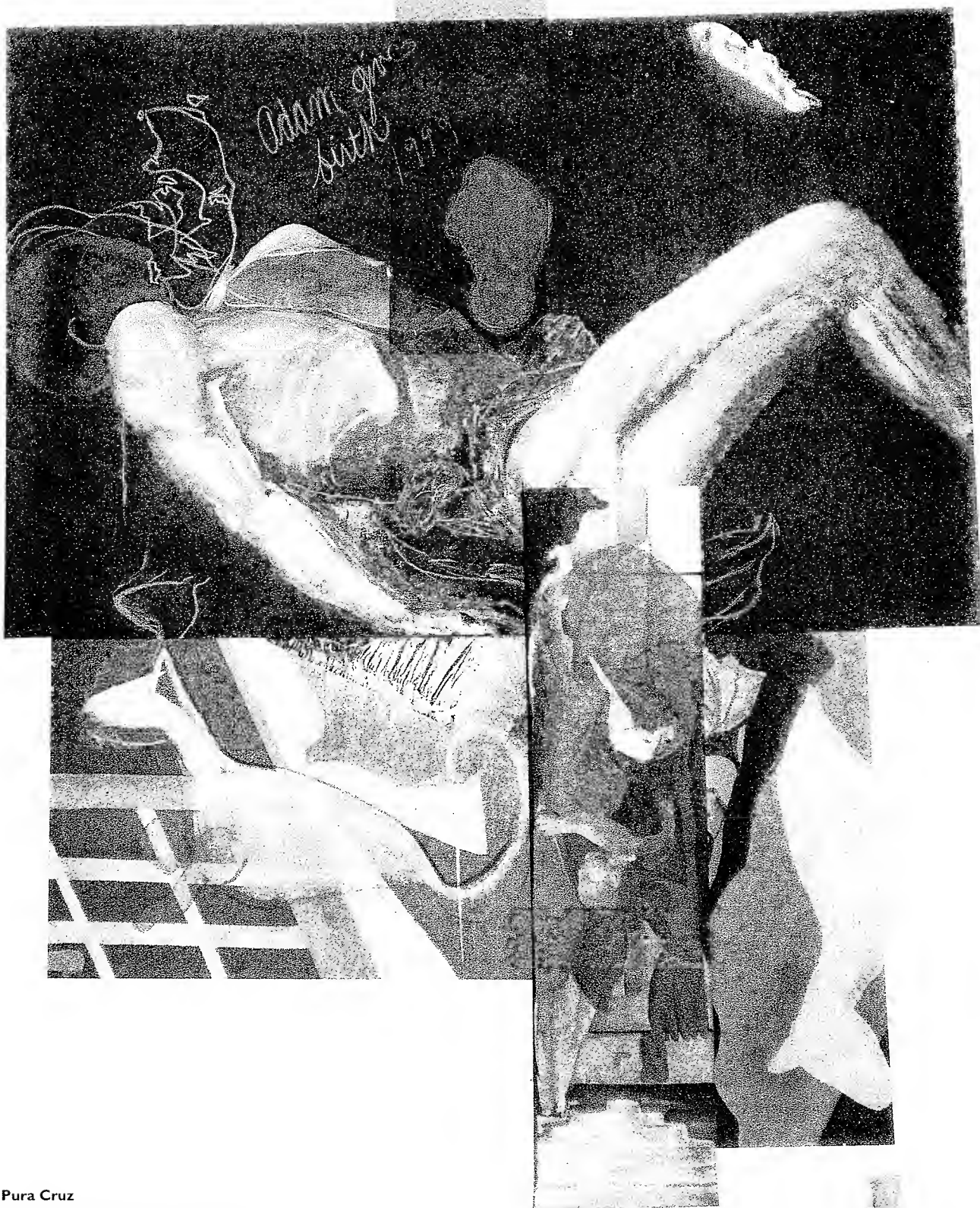
To this eye, the announcement created puzzlement and denial, evident in all new creative ventures, be they

artistic or scientific. As an artist I was impelled to interpret the vision and complete the *Adam—1999* series with a painting entitled *After Frida: The Old-Fashioned Way*. No other artist has depicted birth more dramatically and truer to nature than Frida Kahlo.

*Fast Forward*, a series on gene coding, is a natural extension of the *Adam—1999* series. During the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., one ancient Greek school of philosophy held the belief that singular and unchangeable Being was the only reality and that plurality, change, and motion were only illusory.

Recently I worked for a dentist who would attach himself to the "sweet air" equipment at his office for many hours at a time. Similarly, the main character in *The Lawnmower Man* is driven to virtual states of mind. The ancient philosophy of the illusory may well be pointing to the new Past, Present, Future. Induced realities, some predict, will infinitely alter generations of children to come.

Dial 911 . . .

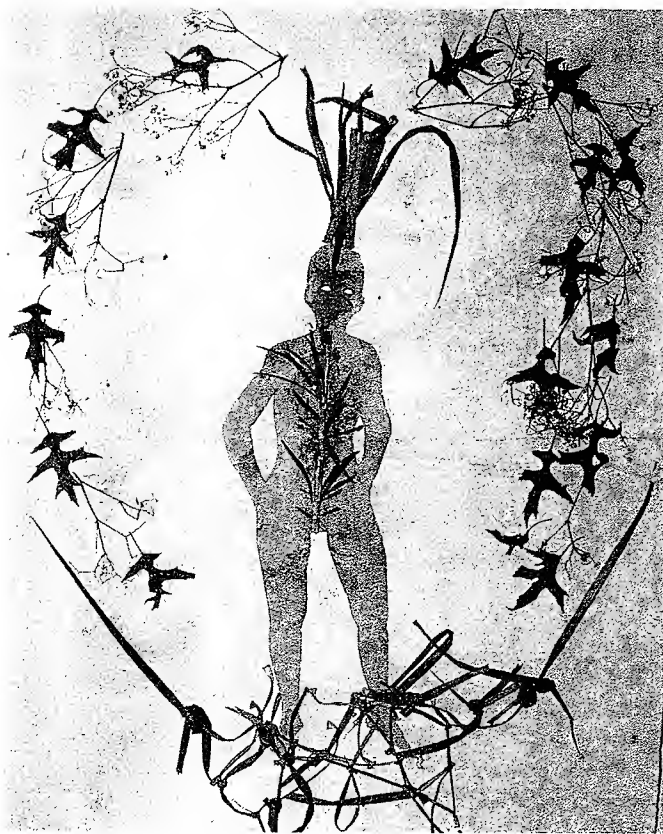


**Pura Cruz**

Adam—1999 series: Adam Gives Birth, 1990  
mixed media, 6'3" x 5'.

Photo: Overview/Whiting Wicker.

## RAQUELÍN MENDIETA



Raquelín Mendieta

*La barca de oro (Shivani series), 1989*  
amate paper, leaves, flowers, grass. 31" x 23-1/2".

Photo: Barry Considine.

### MAS SOY LATINA AMERICANA

(EXTRAÍDOS DE UM POEMA)

Peguei o bonde errado,  
saltei no ponto certo,  
na hora não mercada,  
vestida de festa,  
MAS era domingo de praia.

Nascida mulher, em mundo de homem,  
não disse amém, fui expulsa do coro.  
Fechada em copas, de paus, não de ouro,  
MAS colecionei momentos.

Um dia quebrou-se espelho, fugiu a madastra,  
e em terras do Norte, disseram-me que nem  
tão branca eu era.  
Afastada do rebanho,  
desaprendi as artes da sedução.

MARY GARCIA CASTRO

E como não falava inglês  
fiquei sem ter com quem cismar,  
MAS me apresentei a mim,  
lembrando os companheiros de além mar.

Com muito prazer, gostei do que vi,  
e não tentei mas tradução.

Desde as minhas sedas, tomei partido  
pelos descamisados,  
Chegou tempo de se sentir história,  
vivenciar desejo não compartilhado,  
ter o gosto do ideal repartido  
MAS dividida entre ou ser camarada ou ser amante.

Ancorada no futuro,  
indiferente as proclamas  
sobre a morte da utopia,  
tão cantada na imprensa burguesa,  
junto ismos, ecologias, e eus,  
bordando uma ampla saia vermelha,  
Epa He! minha mãe  
uma grande bandeira vermelha  
da luta festa luta  
por um socialismo  
reinventado no caminho do seu fazer-se  
por mulheres, homens, negros, negras,  
brancos e brancas, jovens, velhos e velhas,  
da classe trabalhadora,  
respeitando as identidades, mas não a subordinação,  
mas não a exploração.

Com as vozes nossas,  
MAS de toda la America Nuestra.  
La America del Che, de Martí, de Flora Tristan  
feminista que no século XIX, foi a primeira  
a gritar  
"cuidado companheiro, o mais explorado dos  
obrigados pode estar oprimindo a uma mulher,"  
e sem saber, identificando-se com um patrão.

Hoje, Deixei a fixação por portos  
e aprendi o gosto de ser navio  
reencontrando os ancestrais,  
em outros mares,  
com outras bússolas,  
MAS com o mesmo refrão:  
"navegar é preciso"  
que la lucha continúa.  
Sucesso à diretoria para assuntos da mulher  
do Sindicato.

To express what *Latina* means to me personally, to an unknown audience, is impossible without introducing myself. In the U.S. I would be considered a "white" Latina, or as some Latins have addressed me, a *blanquita*.

I have had certain privileges that derive from that condition as I have also been discriminated against because of that condition — the misconception being that having a white skin forbids one from having experienced or understanding discrimination. On a larger scale *Latina* means many things, such as a rich panorama of multicultural references, the ability to forge one's own identity outside of a given concept of group, the versatility that being different occasions, the capacity to comprehend and learn from other cultures and strategies, to move inside/outside of shifting parameters.

## DOLORES GUERRERO-CRUZ

*The Bride* is a statement about my struggle as an artist and as a single parent who had to leave the profession I desired and take another profession in order to make a living. My divorce played a big part in this struggle, and that's why I used the bride.

It is not a statement against marriage but a statement that one must first be what one really wants to be before she can be anything else. I used the bride as a symbol for this because most people believe that marriage is the ultimate happiness, but I believe doing what you really want is the happiness people are looking for. I wanted to be an artist and was not able to, so until I became able to achieve that goal, I could not be complete. This was a death of some sort.

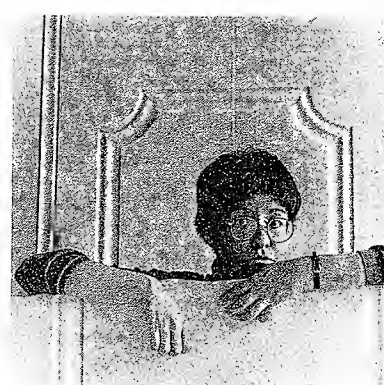
It is very difficult to be an artist when you are by yourself. It is also extremely difficult to be an artist when you are married, then a single parent. What my bride says is that because I am a woman, a single parent and/or a wife, the artist in me had been neglected in order for me to be everything else one is taught to be when growing up.

Women must sacrifice and give up more than men. Chicanas have a harder struggle simply because we are Chicanas and we are women. I believe women in general have this burden because of the way this world has formed itself. Women growing up in my day and age had it harder, but I know that for the women of tomorrow, the struggle will be easier. Hopefully these women will have advantages and choices to make their lives better.

Dolores Guerrero-cruz

*The Bride*, 1985  
serigraph, 28" x 40".





## BRINCANDO EL CHARCO: FRAGMENTS OF A SCRIPT

PRODUCED, WRITTEN, AND DIRECTED BY FRANCES NEGRÓN-MUNTANER

*Brincando el charco* ("Crossing the Creek") is a 57-minute experimental narrative on contemporary Puerto Rican identities. The film mixes fiction, archival footage, current demonstration images, processed interviews, music video, and soap opera conventions to weave the story of Claudia Marín, a middle-class, light-skinned Puerto Rican lesbian and photographer attempting to construct community in the U.S. In the process of confronting the simultaneity of privilege and oppression that structures her position, the film becomes a meditation on class, race, and sexuality as shifting differences, inasmuch as Claudia's identifications are not limited to her own "identities" but constantly cross all lines. The voices of Afro-Puerto Rican women, third-generation Puerto Rican young men, middle-class Island-born intellectuals, and gay men produce a mosaic that cannot be reduced to any one element — be it national, demographic, or ideological. At this writing the film is in its last stage of post-production and is expected to be released in October 1993. The following excerpts correspond to a loose chronological order.

### 1.

Slow-motion image of people on the sidelines as they watch the Puerto Rican Pride Parade in Philadelphia, 1991. Close-up of Claudia in her photography studio. Montage of Claudia's photography. Black-and-white photographs of interviewees in the film. An image of two men and a huge American flag with 51 stars. Slow-moving shot of one of the parade's beauty queens looking straight to the camera. Slow-moving shot of gay and lesbian contingent of parade, showing a Puerto Rican flag with a pink triangle instead of a star.

#### Claudia (Voiceover):

*Por más de un siglo, las voces que han logrado resonar en mi país repiten una letanía incierta: ¿quiénes somos? ¿hacia dónde vamos? Como si una respuesta unívoca nos fuera a hacer libres. Como si el "nosotros" fuera posible más allá del lenguaje y la imagen. Yo he sido un eco de ellas. Fotógrafa de rostros isleños desperdigados... A veces creo encontrarlos, sin encontrarme yo. ¿Contradicción? No siempre. Las esencias siempre huyen, inscribiéndose los múltiples deseos de unos cuerpos.*

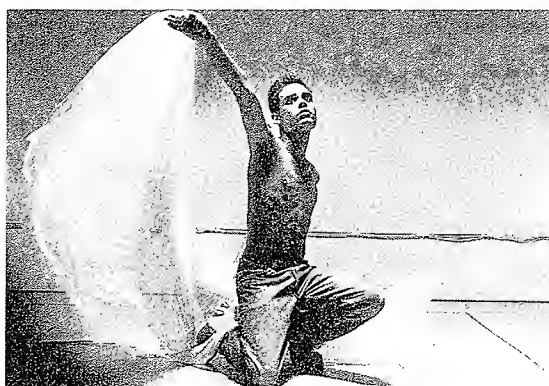
#### Claudia (Voiceover):

The voices that have resonated in my country for more than a century repeat an uncertain litany: Who are we? Where are we going? As if a univocal answer would make us free. As if the "we" were possible beyond language and image. I have been an echo of these voices. A photographer of scattered Island faces. I sometimes believe I have found us without finding myself. Contradiction? Not always. Essences are always escaping, inscribing instead the multiple desires of body surfaces.

### 2.

Claudia finishes a portrait of Puerto Rican voguer Ray González. After developing the portrait, Claudia takes the subway home, making one stop to pick up a package at the post office. Claudia's lover, Elizabeth, is on her way out the door, but before she leaves, the phone rings, bringing the news that Claudia's father has died and that the family requests her presence at the funeral. A brief discussion follows as Claudia struggles

FRANCES NEGRÓN-MUNTANER



with conflicting emotions about attending a family event, since for years communication has been virtually nonexistent. Elizabeth asserts that Claudia must attend so as to let go of the past. Claudia resists invoking her last memory of her father, but the images surface nonetheless.

**Father:**

*Mira, míralo, muchacha. Con el trabajo y el sacrificio que da para criar a un muchacho en este país y tú me pagas con esto. [Throws her a photograph he found.] Te voy a decir algo y óyeme bien. Si te quieres seguir revolcando con esas mujeres malas, porque son malas, yo no te quiero más por aquí. ¡Y es más, ahora mismo te me vas de aquí!*

**Claudia:**

*¡Yo la quiero!*

**Father:**

*No me contestes con esas suciedades, coño, vete.*

**Mother:**

*Claudio, es tu hija, por Dios.*

**Father:**

Look, girl, with the hardships one has to endure to raise a child in this country, and you pay me with this! [Throws her a photograph he found.] I'm going to tell you something, and listen up good. If you're going to continue to be mixed up with those bad women — because they are bad — I don't want you here. I mean, I want you out of here right now!

**Claudia:**

I love her!

**Father:**

Don't answer me with that shit, damn it.

**Mother:**

Claudio, she's your daughter, for god's sake.

The argument continues, and after Claudia calls father hypocritical and intolerant, he hits her. Younger brother defends her, and mother gives Claudia her blessing as father banishes daughter from the home. Claudia recedes from scene. Point-of-view shot of family members framed by doorway.

### 3.

Elizabeth cancels a meeting in order to address the situation at home with Claudia, who is still undecided about attending the funeral. As Claudia watches Elizabeth hang up the phone, she recalls a conversation among the two of them and Toni Cade, an African American friend who as a child growing up in Harlem experienced the massive influx of Puerto Ricans into New York. B&W archival footage of Puerto Rican and African Americans in New York from late 1940s through 1970s.

**Toni (Voiceover):**

*It was the year of the big snow in New York. Some new people moved into the building. A large family — babies, children, married couples, three sets of elders. These new tenants didn't seem to have any winter clothes. This was not too strange. Folks up from down South didn't have heavy clothes either. The little girls wore pierced earrings; the women wore jewelry and bright clothing. We thought they were gypsies. A new kind of gypsy, though, the kind that apparently intended to live in an apartment building rather than a storefront. One of the boys was in our class for about a minute. We didn't even get to hear his name and hear him speak. They put him on a bench outside the principal's office. We heard later that he'd been put in remedial class, the assumption being if you have no English, you have no IQ. We were curious about him. Some of his relatives looked just like gypsies. But some of his relatives looked just like us. Who were these people?*

## 4.

In Claudia's package, sent by a friend, is a videotape of the first gay and lesbian parade in Puerto Rico. After reading the accompanying letter pointing to the event's many contradictions, images of the gay and lesbian contingent in New York's Puerto Rican Pride Parade flash in her memory.

### **Claudia (Voiceover):**

*Is the language expanding the boundaries of my desire, English? Does it then get translated, appropriated, and transformed only later, after layers of mediation? Yes. The debt is obvious. No. There are so many other debts. Yes and no because I make love in Puerto Rican Spanish with a soft bolero in the background and an attitude picked up from S/M drag. My empowerment speaks a creole tongue. I can't afford any purity.*

## 5.

FLASH. Portrait of Moises, an activist involved with ACT UP New York.

### **Moises:**

*Al principio que estábamos trabajando en la idea de ir a Puerto Rico, una de las cosas que yo me cuestioné fue como yo, como miembro de ACT UP Nueva York, iba a lograr que en Puerto Rico se llevaran a cabo acciones de activismo en contra del SIDA. Como yo lo visualizo es que tanto el sur del Bronx, como el barrio hispano aquí en Nueva York son como otro barrio de Puerto Rico. Lo que me hizo a mí entender viendo la cuestión del puente aéreo con la facilidad que la gente de Puerto Rico viaja acá porque saben que aquí hay un lugar de pertenencia a donde pueden venir a conseguir tratamiento y también pueden sentirse en una atmósfera entre puertorriqueños, me justificó a mí la idea de que sí podríamos usar ese mismo puente aéreo para desarrollar este tipo de acción.*

### **Moises:**

When we were considering going to Puerto Rico, one of the things that I questioned was how I, as a member of ACT UP New York, was going to make certain activist actions against AIDS happen. As I see it, the South Bronx, the Hispanic barrio in New York, is like another neighborhood of Puerto Rico. This made me realize —and also seeing the ease with which people travel here because they know that they belong and can obtain treatment and feel comfortable among Puerto Ricans — that we could use that same air bridge to develop this kind of political action.

## 6.

Claudia and Elizabeth are driving to the airport. Claudia has decided to attend the funeral and is flying standby. She glances at her lover and realizes that part of her inability to address resentment comes from a defensive position that is still encoded in dichotomies.

### **Claudia (Voiceover):**

*My intimacy, richly populated by women. My political imagery, by gay men.*

## 7.

FLASH. Agnes's portrait. Agnes is a light-skinned, Island-born academic living in U.S. for past decade.

### **Agnes:**

*Mira, la invisibilidad de las lesbianas tiene que ver con la invisibilidad en general de la sexualidad femenina en la sociedad. La idea de que para una mujer lograr placer erótico siempre es en relación a la presencia del pene. Entonces, es como impensable que una mujer pueda tener relaciones sexuales con otra mujer porque ¿que van a hacer dos mujeres juntas en una cama? Es impensable, no hay un pene. Entonces, digamos, yo creo que por ahí va la cosa. Es decir, la incapacidad, la imposibilidad o la dificultad de representar la sexualidad femenina.*

### **Agnes:**

Look, the invisibility of lesbians relates to the general invisibility of women's sexuality in society. The idea that for a woman to achieve erotic pleasure, it's always in relation to the presence of the penis. It's like unthinkable that a woman can have sexual relations with another woman, because what are two women going to do together in bed? It's unthinkable: there's no penis. That's where I think things are at. It's the incapacity, the impossibility, or the difficulty of representing feminine sexuality.

## 8.

Claudia is lying in bed. Elizabeth's arms pull her close. Following is a black-and-white film sequence exploring lesbian eroticism.



Gloria Claudia Ortiz

*Two Men Urinating*, 1987  
oil on canvas, 66" x 58".



Gloria Claudia Ortiz

*Orphans I: Men and Prostitutes*, 1987/88  
oil on canvas, 50" x 100" diptych.

## AWILDA STERLING

The struggle of Caribbean art and society is to decide, develop, and correctly and precisely define Caribbean identity. Our people have always been attacked by the economic interests of the so-called First World nations. They have conveniently called us Third World, being themselves responsible for this situation. Almighty nations, they have acted and forced their powers upon us for the last 500 years, thus planting an underdeveloped attitude in Caribbean consciousness.

Every cry for freedom has been violently shut off, except for countries that now have sufficient power to fight back. Puerto Rico is one such country. It has been struggling, fighting, and shouting back since the first colonial imposition in 1492. Catholic and Calvinist morality have pressed upon us the castrating sensation of not expressing ourselves as sensuously complete. Ancestral African manifestations related to fertility

are sacred rituals, but not to the imperialist mind.

I and the women-mothers-sisters-friends who comprise our labor, artistic, and professional communities deal continually with this reality, each in our own way, because it is ingrained in us.

As a child, my main personality-forming references were Hollywood musicals. On the other hand, my family was and still is a very festive one that always celebrated with music, food, drinks, and dance. My corporeal sense system was organic, while my intellect was completely abstract. No wonder confusion arose.

Watching Gene Kelly, Ginger Rogers, and Fred Astaire gave rise to a desire to fly not only onstage but away from reality. As an adult woman, I have confronted the reality of stereotypes, and I work with them, within them, and against them.



**Awilda Sterling**

*Agamenón-Kinsuk se ahogó en el Lago Dos Bocas* ("Agamemnon-Kinsuk Drowning in Dos Bocas Lake"), 1989.  
Music: Francis Schwartz. Choreography: Awilda Sterling.

Photo: Ricardo Alcaraz.



(l. to r.) Viveca Vázquez, Karen Langevin, Mari Martín in *Mascanda Inglés* ("Chewing English"), 1984.

Choreography: Viveca Vázquez.

Photo: Tom Brazil.

Movement is part of change. Dance is a new and not-yet-developed art in Puerto Rico: ballet has a young tradition of 30 years, and modern dance has existed for 15–18 years but only in spurts. Some of our popular dances survive but have become endangered species, for they are no longer part of our everyday life or entertainment. False progress and consumerism have taken over. We are the shining star of the U.S.

While I teach I learn. I have directed dance workshops at the University of Puerto Rico since 1985. There is no dance department at our 86-year-old university, but at least some classes are offered as electives. I teach mostly to nondancers, who usually represent the most interesting material in the class. Those who have danced come from ballet or jazz. For the majority the concept of dance develops from watching television.

My class deals with body consciousness, breathing, and an experimental approach to dance and movement — inquiring into personal raw output to establish movement creation, expanding the limits of comfortable terrain to discover inner organic power, stressing imaginative thinking and applying it to the body.

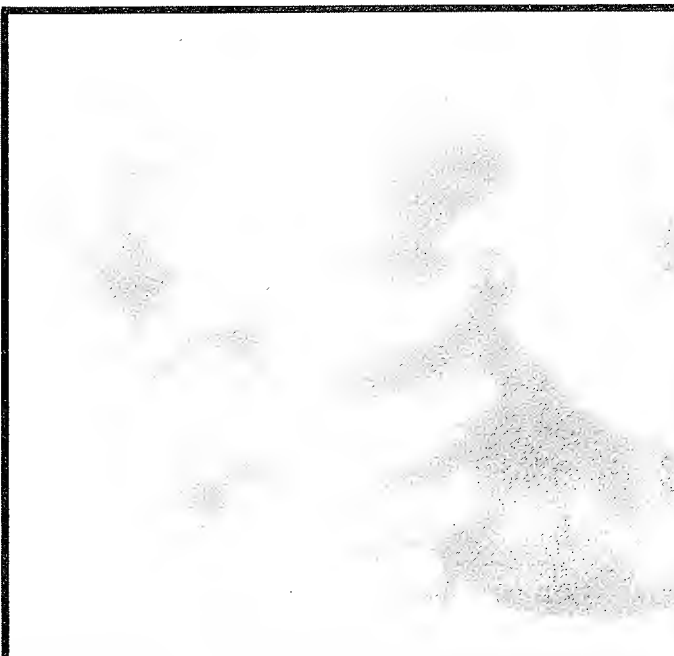
We are confronted with stereotypical molds about dance as dance, dance as art, women as women, men as men, latins

encased as latins. The mold can start to break. Students respond to permission to move, to find breath, to discover possibility — defying pre-established codes, limiting norms that predispose our expression. Improvisation is food for movement. The body is the self laboratory. Anatomical acknowledgement, explanatory, auto-informing . . . integration of bone, muscle, breath, thought, and sense . . . structure has stunted . . . movement invention and body consciousness, motivation for growth.

The "system" predisposes shapes and rhythms. The inner self becomes unrecognizable as an option. I want the option to explore music not as command nor as the rule for climax in a dance. Though music has magnificence, it is not the only source for ecstasy in movement.

The Caribbean body does not have to look accepted, intruded upon. What is expected? — pictorial, incapable of abstracting. The abstract belongs to another mind. The color of our culture is seen as permanent exoticism. It is the education of the colonized, the imitation of the masters.

Redefining education, recycling thought . . . out of cue, out of "count," out of step/stepping out of pattern . . . using movement as part of liberation.



## RESISTANCE AND AFFIRMATION IN AFRICAN DIASPORA LATIN COMMUNITIES

MARTA MORENO VEGA

### BACKGROUND & FRAMEWORK

I. En la Ciudad de Puerto Rico, a cuatro de agosto de mil ochocientos cincuenta y uno: ante de mí, el infracrito Escribano Público, y testigos, compareció Don Eleuterio Giménez y Moreno, de este vecindario, a quien doy fe conozco, y dijo: que está escritura por auto de doce de julio último, dictado por el juzgado de primer instancia de esta Capital en el expediente seguido por la esclava Olalla contra Doña Josefa Caira de Carreras sobre su libertad y "por mal trato," que corre por esta escribanía de mi cargo, de que doy fe: que en tal virtud, en la vía y forma más legal, otorga: que vende real y efectivamente a Don Francisco Márquez, de este propio domicilio, la referida esclava Olalla, que a sus causante Doña Josefa Caira corresponde en propiedad por donación que de ella le hizo el Presbítero Don José Joaquín Lalinde por la cláusula 12.ª de su testamento, que dice así: "Item. Es también mi voluntad que, tan luego como yo fallezca, mi esclava Olaya [sic] vaya al poder de Doña Josefa Caira de Carreras, vecina de la Capital, con quien permanecerá sin excusa alguna hasta que, cumplidos sus veinticinco años quede libre para siempre [lo] mismo que los hijos, si durante este tiempo en que queda sujeta a la servidumbre los tuviera"; cuya esclava vende al referido Márquez a uso de feria y sin lugar a redhibitoria en precio de ochenta pesos macuquinos que confiesa tener recibidos a su satisfacción; y por no ser de presente la entrega, renuncia la excepción del dinero no contado y la prueba del recibo; con la precisa

condición de otorgar carta de libertad a la referida esclava tan pronto como cumpla veinticinco años, contando ahora diecinueve años, cuatro meses y quince días (Proceso Abolicionista I, 88).

In this excerpt from a bill of sale, the reader learns that Olalla, an enslaved nineteen-year-old woman who has experienced ill treatment by a white Spanish woman named Doña Josefa Caira, is being sold to Don Francisco Márquez for eighty pesos. Olalla is to be freed at the age of twenty-five, and any children she has are to be freed as well.

II. ...[W]hile the owners, overseers and managers who sought these associations and pleasures with black women kept a countenance of sternness and even exhibited attitudes of hatred and often contempt for Africans, they were not slow to take advantage of the cover of night to take up liaisons. It was clear from these associations that the racial superiority and colour superiority which these white men peddled were merely palliatives for the actual reality of economic domination and the exploitation of human beings. The attitude of the white women was conditioned more often than not by the fact that they saw the black 'wenches' as their natural rivals in situations in which the white women were temporarily relegated to the background, though they were the legally recognized spouses (Thompson 178).

Thompson's statement and the bill of sale, taken together, encapsulate the process of objectification: the conversion of human beings into property and the institutionalization of racism, sexism, and enslavement. These quotations assist in framing the reality of enslaved African men and women in the Latin Caribbean and the Americas, a reality closely paralleling those in English- and Dutch-speaking countries. The designation of Africans and their descendants as property allowed Europeans to exploit and dehumanize us. Cuba, we should remember, was one of the last countries to abolish slavery, and the United States abolished segregation just forty years ago. Today African descendants who identify with their African Latin cultural legacy are doing what other African descendants are doing: developing strategies to dislocate the Eurocentric paradigm.

## INTRODUCTION

The legacy inherited by women of African descent in the Americas constitutes an ongoing problem, especially within the Latino community. An inability to deal with internal racist attitudes, sexist practices, and racial diversity continues to foster the promotion of *blancamiento* while maintaining — *tapando el cielo con la mano* — that there is no racism in the Latin Caribbean and Americas. By assuming the attitude projected by Jamaican tourism advertisements (“out of many, one people”), Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Panamanians, and others perpetuate the myths of racial and gender equality through the mutual conspiracy of silence, the goal being to display a united “Latino front.” Distinguishing our Africanity from that of African Americans is bound up with expectations of developing a distinct political/cultural power base. Women and men of African descent, the majority of our population, are underrepresented in leadership positions, while self-appointed Latino leaders, overwhelmingly white and male in both race and consciousness, continue to serve as power brokers and negotiators with the European American community. The comfort level thus provided European Americans in dealing with “Latinos” who look somewhat like them “but not really” maintains the Latino community divided, because alliances and objectives that would forge a solid national/international agenda grounded in our interests are blurred by the integrationist agenda of being more like/acting more like/looking more like the white European power brokers who maintain our oppressive conditions.

According to those in the general community who maintain internal racist attitudes, the Latin brand of Africanity is more polished and civilized than the American brand. We are made to feel that we must remain apart and distinct so that we can get our own piece of the pie. Evidently, although our community has no problem forming alliances with our European American oppressors, there is a problem with forging alliances with other groups of color experiencing similarly oppressive conditions. The notion of a common agenda for mutual empowerment being unthinkable, the African Latino/African American/African Caribbean community continues our colonial oppressors’ divide-and-conquer mentality, guaranteeing that the discriminatory and sexist practices fostered by the legacy of enslavement continue to flourish within our Latin sector.

The Dominican Republic continues to enslave Haitians. Brazil continues to list gradations of skin color, announcing that the whiter you are, the better you are. The Cuban and Puerto Rican communities continue to exalt *mulatas del pelo bueno*. *Blancamiento* is celebrated; darker skin and African presence and contributions are devalued. The image of Black and mulata women remains the sexual, animalistic, primitive creature of desire who is ready to be seduced. *El Negro/La Negra: si no lo hace a la entrada, lo hace a la salida. Tiene la alma blanca aunque sea Negra* unfortunately continues to permeate the thinking in our communities, perpetuating the concept that everything good is European, European American, or Hispanic — and that everything African or Native American is valueless and primitive. Thompson suggests that the so-called color problem masks other divisive factors: “Slavery provides the root cause for the survival of shade gradations, thus inducing social stratification as well as wide variations of economic power in the social structure. Colour differentiation was induced as part of the strategy which militated against the cohesion of the rank and file of all the oppressed peoples dwelling in slave societies” (165).

As Latina/os we tend to forget that our societies, with their strong Native spiritual and cultural bases, have maintained numerous African beliefs and practices. Though it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss them all, some at least should be mentioned: ancestor worship (*espiritismo*),

## INTERNAL RACIST ATTITUDES:

¿Y TU ABUELA, DONDE ESTA?



orisha, Santeria, Cabocolo, Candomble, and spiritualism; kinship and extended family systems (*compadre-comadre*); musical forms such as bomba, plena, merengue, son, rumba, mambo, and chachacha; foods such as sancocho, pasteles, cuchifritos, and vianda; and the community economic system of *el san*, or *sou sou*. The *cimarrónes* of our communities built spaces of resistance and affirmation throughout the Latino diaspora, ensuring that Africanity would be passed on to future generations and that we would be grounded in nature's vital forces and energy, *ashé*.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

**The image of  
Black and mulata  
women remains  
the sexual,  
animalistic,  
primitive creature  
of desire who is  
ready to be  
seduced.**

How does an African Puerto Rican woman child survive racism, sexism, miseducation, and limited access to opportunities that by right should belong to all human beings? How does one negotiate the dual identity of being African and Puerto Rican within a community that overwhelmingly negates its African heritage while romanticizing its Native American heritage?

Besides being an African descendant and a Puerto Rican, I am a woman, a parent, a grandparent, a community worker, an institution builder, an educator, and a student. I was born in New York City of parents born in Puerto Rico and was raised and nurtured in El Barrio. Traditional values and survival methods have been critical to my present racial and cultural identification and groundedness. The multiple realities of growing up in El Barrio, also known as Spanish Harlem or East Harlem, reflect the juggling of value systems generated by both the inner community and the outer community. Simultaneously negotiating often diametrically opposed outer value systems, criteria, and strategies leads toward assimilation and cultural dislocation into an "American mainstream" lifestyle that continues to be overtly racist.

What I experienced is experienced throughout African diaspora communities and environments like El Barrio, which reflect purposeful underdevelopment and lack of support of their organizational infrastructures. Two childhood incidents remain vivid in my mind, making it clear that as an African Puerto Rican child, I did not have the same access to opportunities as the European American children who lived nearby.

The first incident revolved around an examination for "bright students," who at that time were in classes with numbers like 5-1 or 5-2 to signal the special intelligence of the children, while the "dumb" classes had numbers like 5-14 and 5-15. I went to P.S. 121 at 102 Street in El Barrio, where the students were primarily African American and Puerto Rican. P.S. 168 was located at 104 Street in East Harlem; students who went there were mostly Italian, and the few Puerto Rican and African American children who attended were relegated to the "dumb" classes. Through an Italian friend whose daughter went to P.S. 168, my mother became aware of an entrance examination for prestigious Hunter Junior High that was being administered to classes 5-1 and 5-2 at her daughter's school. This friend asked my mother if, like her own bright child, I too was being given this exam. I knew nothing about it. My mother decided to visit the principal, Mr. Oak.

He explained that the students in my school were not bright enough to take the test and that he did not want to hurt or embarrass us by giving us a test he knew we would fail. My mother insisted. Was I not like her friend's daughter, who was also in a 5-1 class? Did I not do my homework faithfully and daily, with extra-credit homework besides? With A averages, how could I and the other students not do well?

To make a long story short, we all failed the exam. After cursing out Mr. Oak in English, which I hadn't been aware my mother spoke, she transferred me to P.S. 168, using her friend's address. There I was placed in class 5-14. Trying to make the best of a disastrous situation, my mother transferred me back to P.S. 121's class 5-1. Clearly there were two systems of public education: one for European Americans and another, inferior one for People of Color.

The second incident involved a teacher calling in my mother to request that she not dress me "so clean and pretty" every day. This woman, a European American, felt that my parents were dressing me up to look like a "white child" and that other students might get jealous. Knowing I was always surrounded by friends, my mother asked her for examples of acts of jealousy. There hadn't



yet been any, said the teacher, but she was sure there would be, because my parents were dressing me beyond their means. Again my mother pulled out her English vocabulary, telling the teacher that her business was to teach, not to speculate about people's finances, and that she was obviously doing a very poor job of it, since all her students had failed the Hunter entrance exam.

In the 1930s there were battles for quality education; in the 1950s, for equal opportunity; in the 1960s, for equal access; in the 1970s and 1980s, for inclusion; and in the 1990s there are battles for equal resources. Puerto Rican and African American parents continue to wage all these battles as the entire New York City public school system becomes one big class 5-14. At the same time, the City University system (CUNY) and the State University system (SUNY) exhibit greater and greater disparities in resourcing as CUNY increasingly becomes a system serving primarily students of color.

As the income levels of the rich increase at a more rapid rate than at any other time in history, the poor are getting poorer at a correspondingly rapid rate. We have two Americas: one for the rich and white, the other for the poor of color. For the Latino community, especially the women, the struggle for the survival of our families and communities is getting harder. Nonetheless, we continue our efforts to survive and thrive as warrior women, and our need to continue developing sacred spaces of resistance and affirmation increases as our economic resources shrink.

There is limited documentation of women's role in building free communities of resistance and affirmation during enslavement. Most published research has been conducted by men focusing on men's role in building maroon societies, though increasingly women are investigating the "sheroic" contributions of maroon women in these free, runaway societies that ranged from tiny communities that disbanded in less than a year to communities that lasted centuries and included thousands of *cimarrónes*. In isolation the *cimarrónes* were able to recreate collective, traditional African societies. Richard Price has stressed that viability usually required that villages be located in "inhospitable, out-of-the-way areas" (5). Latin America had its Yoruba and Kikongo communities; Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and other countries had their palenques, quilombos, mocambos, cumbes, ladeiras, and mambises that kept African traditional practices alive.

Las Casas de Santos (the houses of Orisha) of Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Candombles of Brazil, the Vodun temples of the Dominican Republic, and the Ile Orisha of the United States exemplify the maroon spirit of resistance. "Resistance was an integral part of Caribbean slave society. Its pervasiveness demonstrated the slaves' consciousness of themselves as human beings with their own values and aspirations different from those of the slave owners. From the point of view of the slave masters, anxious to maximize their material wealth, slave resistance displayed the bothersome nature, and one of the inherent contradictions, of this peculiar species of property. Slaves resisted in myriad ways. These could range from the subtle and passive, constantly acted out on a routinized daily basis, to the violent, whether singly or collectively, planned or spontaneous. But perhaps the most vexing of the slaves' resistance techniques to the owners was the act of running away to establish their own habitations — Maroon Societies" (Campbell 1). Price, too, has emphasized the centrality of resistance: "All the African religious phenomena of the colonial era, or almost all, must be understood in the context of this climate of cultural resistance" (199).

Women predominate in contemporary African-based religious practice within Latino culture, perpetuating a philosophy and a practical framework that speaks to the African historical continuum. "Women (black women) were thought to have special magical powers, such as being more susceptible to ritual trance" (Price 196). We not only affirm cultural values by recreating family and community but also resist oppression by passing on practices that speak to a world vision grounded in nature and the vital energy force of *ashé*. Ancestral spirits and divination are integral components, providing historical context and experiences. Divination through the corpus of the *odu* of Ifa provides a philosophical framework. The *orishas*, or divinities, of the Yoruba and Kikongo nations pro-

## WARRIOR WOMEN AND THE RECREATION OF COMMUNITY



**Self-appointed  
Latino leaders,  
overwhelmingly  
white and male  
in both race  
and consciousness,  
continue to serve as  
power brokers with  
the European  
American community.**

vide African-based role models of warrior women. The sacred warrior spirit is embodied in the female principle, Yemaya, who is present in the ocean; in the whirlwind, personified by the warrior Oya, who precedes Chango into battle; in the active spirit of community building, friendship, and love (one must work at friendship and fight for loved ones) that are reflected in Ochun, the orisha of sweet water.

While developing contemporary methods of operation, modern warrior women have followed the African warrior spirit — women such as Afro-Cuban Mariana Grajales, mother of revolutionary Antonio Maceo; Benedita da Silva, Brazilian congresswoman; Nydia Velasquez, member of the U.S. House of Representatives; Dr. Antonia Pantoja, founder of Aspira Inc., Universidad Boricua, and Producir, a collective economic project in Puerto Rico; and so many others. Insisting upon the inclusion of Puerto Rican and African culture as integral parts of the school curriculum, Afro-Puertorriqueña Dr. Evelina Antonetty understood that identity, self-determination, and the development of our own organizations are critical our people's survival. She created United Bronx Parents to provide parents with the understanding and training needed to control their communities and their children's education. With other women and men she founded the People's Board of Education, charging the New York City Board of Education with educational genocide of our young. Such institutions focus on a paradigm of affirmation and resistance and on a practice culturally centered in the historical legacy of our community.

My own work over the past twenty-four years has been grounded in my identification with my own racial and cultural location in the historical continuum. During the early 1970s, after Community School Board 4 of East Harlem terminated funding for El Museo del Barrio, I was involved in founding Amigos del Museo del Barrio, Inc., which today is the museum's governing body. I was also a founder of The Association of Hispanic Arts (though I disagreed with the use of the term *hispanic*, I was outvoted by the other ten founders). It was clear that we needed a networking/information/service agency that could define, negotiate, and advocate a common-ground Latino perspective — an agency that would protect the discrete space of each of our cultures while politically presenting a common aesthetic/cultural agenda based on criteria of excellence and value established by our own communities. To dislocate Eurocentric-American "universal" perceptions and practices, it was and is necessary to identify, promote, document, and celebrate the pluriversal perspectives of the global cultures that form our national ethos. In creating the Franklin H. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute, the concept was and continues to be the conscious linking of African-based cultures. The internationalist Pan-African world view reflected in the Center's work is grounded in the unifying belief systems and philosophical vision that travelled to the Americas in the bodies of enslaved Africans. The African-based expressions manifested in contemporary cultures throughout the Americas speak to the power of these images and practices to assist in maintaining our communities and reflecting their historical and contemporary realities. In order to understand the heritages that are part of the Latino experience — Native American, Asian, European, and East Indian — the Center has forged networks and projects, such as national and international forums, to reunite these communities. Our focus on the development of policies that reflect the right to culture, equity, and a pluriversal standard of excellence has motivated the creation of the International Network for Cultural Equity.

The political activism of the Young Lords Party and the militant Puerto Rican Student Union are models of this same cimarrón spirit that we must continue to internalize in order to achieve racial and cultural liberation, an end to our marginalization through the active dislocation of Eurocentered paradigms. African Latino communities have always understood the need to build organizations that reflect a dual purpose, and it is not an accident that the most powerful organizations we have built as a community have been created by African descendants, both women and men. Their clarity regarding racial and cultural issues has made it possible for them to construct theory and praxis inclusive of our primary concerns, to develop a national stance and oppose an integrationist stance. This cimarrón spirit of affirmation and resistance is, in my opinion, the proper model for our community to follow; the way for us to thrive.



In the process of remaining racially, culturally, and politically grounded, we African Latina/os must provide our children and future generations with a philosophical and historical context that can frame our contemporary reality in the barrios as well as in European American settings. Of greatest importance is ensuring that systems of survival and strategies for the future are intrinsic to our communities so that we are able to safeguard present and future generations, who are at greater risk than we were two generations ago. The possibility of genocide is real when poverty, joblessness, and health risks are escalating in our communities at a faster rate than within any other cultural group.

Our young who are fighting the present racial and cultural wars must hear us document and speak on our own such experiences in order not to feel isolated as they become confronted by increasingly overt racism, discrimination, glass ceilings, and increasingly limited access to the few opportunities we were able to achieve during the late 1960s and 1970s as part of the Black Power movement. Students are hungry for historical information, a philosophical framework, successful methods for working together to achieve common objectives, the identification of heroes and heroines who can serve as mentors and advisors. It is our responsibility — those of us who know that we are of color, that we are not hispanic, that we have a rich legacy of African warriors — to become part of this self-definition and community affirmation. It is empowering and invigorating for me to have increasingly been invited to participate in joint activities in many parts of New York State by Latino, Caribbean, and African American college students actively seeking to unite and understand the common historical, racial, and cultural linkages we share. The Northeastern Unity Conference of Fuerza Latina, organized by students at SUNY-Albany; the African Diaspora Week activities at Cornell; and the Unity African-Latino Conference at SUNY-Binghamton all reflect the sense that our Latino-ness is broad and must be inclusive, part of an overall struggle for equity and equality with other communities.

Envisioning a future in which the African descendant Latino community will thrive requires that our thinkers, our parents, our community activists, and our youth come together in work sessions to hammer out an action agenda informed by our present conditions. Certainly a Latino bill of rights and constitution are not out of the question. Various communities have exercised self-determination concerning their interests and their relationships with other communities. So must we. Because of our racial and cultural diversity we should be able to forge an inclusive system that respects differences and safeguards our racial, social, human, cultural, and political rights within a nonhegemonic framework. We need to strengthen Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and African Studies departments in colleges and universities and establish more of the kinds of independent cultural, educational, social, legal, health, and other organizations that together form a strong community infrastructure. Our most vital organizations have been influenced, built, and directed by Latina women, and we must nurture this tradition. Other groups have built institutions to speak to their struggles and their survival issues, to ensure that society does not forget or ignore their presence, does not repeat its wrongs. So must we build, build, and continue to build the contemporary quilombos and palenques of our communities. Our young women must continue the work of forging spaces of affirmation and resistance as a method of survival. Ashé — may it be so.

**Our need to  
continue developing  
sacred spaces  
of resistance  
and affirmation  
increases as our  
economic resources  
shrink.**

#### Notes

1. Centro de Investigaciones Historicas — Universidad de Puerto Rico Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. *El Proceso Abolicionista en Puerto Rico: Documentos Para Su Estudio*. Vol. 1, *La Institución de la Esclavitud y su Crisis: 1823–1873*.
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4. Price, Richard, ed. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.



**QUISQUEYA HENRIQUEZ**

*Catalina Parra*

**INVERNA LOCKPEZ**

*Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons*

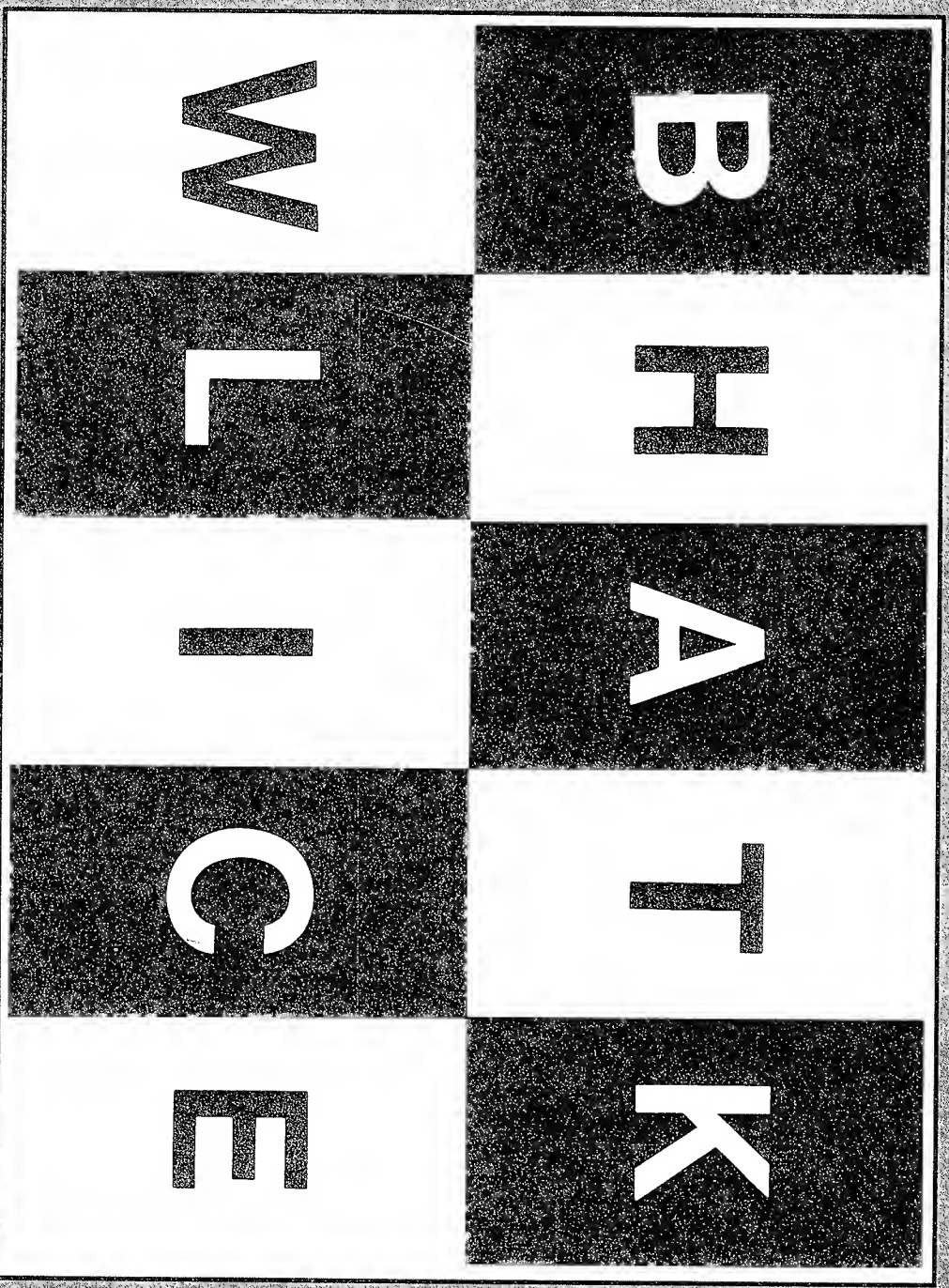
**CONSUELO CASTAÑEDA**

*Lillian Mulero*

edited by

**Inverna**

**Lockpez**



*Certeza (Certitude), 1992.*

QUISQUEYA HENRIQUEZ

*Certeza*






**LA DEUDA E(X)TERNA  
que la pague el Papa**

**let the Pope pay  
THE E(X)TERNAL DEBT**

*Let the Pope Pay the E(x)ternal Debt, 1990, photography, 58" x 30".*

**CATALINA PARRA**

*Let the Pope Pay the E(x)ternal Debt*



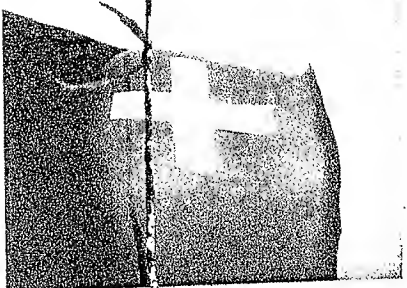
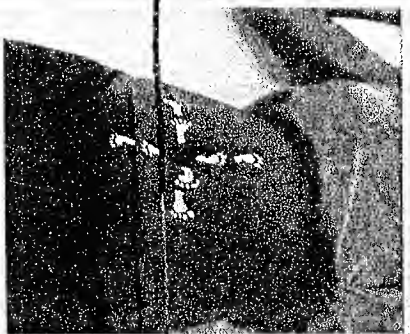
Within the measure of a single year, there have come into the possession and under the sway of the United States of America, four splendid colonies. Two have been captured by force of American arms on land and sea (Cuba and The Philippine Islands); one has been aided to her own experiment in freedom with an assurance of American assistance, advice and dominance in the organization of her new life (Puerto Rico); one has come to us of her own free will, to join the western republic and obtain greater measure of prosperity, progress and security (The Hawaiian Islands) . . .

For good or ill, the United States has entered upon a colonial policy, a policy of expansion, a policy which forces us into the position of a world-power, deep in the complications of international politics and the Eastern Question. It is now too late to turn back . . .

Trumbull White  
*Our New Possessions*, 1898

INVERNA LOCKPEZ

*Our New Possessions*



*Umbilical Cord, 1991 (detail).*

**MARIA MADALENA CAMPOS-PONS**

*Umbilical Cord*

Nosotras somos la misma cosa.

Idénticas heridas, accidentes,  
destrucciones y resurgimientos.

Cada una de nosotras  
atravesada por infinitos caminos,  
cruces de aguas, remolinos fluviales.

Nosotras somos la misma cosa.

Con iguales dolores que estallan sin avisos.

Somos la imagen extendida y lineal  
que proyectamos las unas a las otras.

Grandma

MARIA

My mother

ESTERVINA

My sister

MARTA

Myself

MAGDALENA

My youngest sister

AMPARO

My nieces

ELSY & ELAYNE

AFRICA

All of us women are the same.

Identical wounds and accidents,  
equal havoc and recovery.

An infinite number of roads  
and rivers of swirling waters  
have crossed our paths.

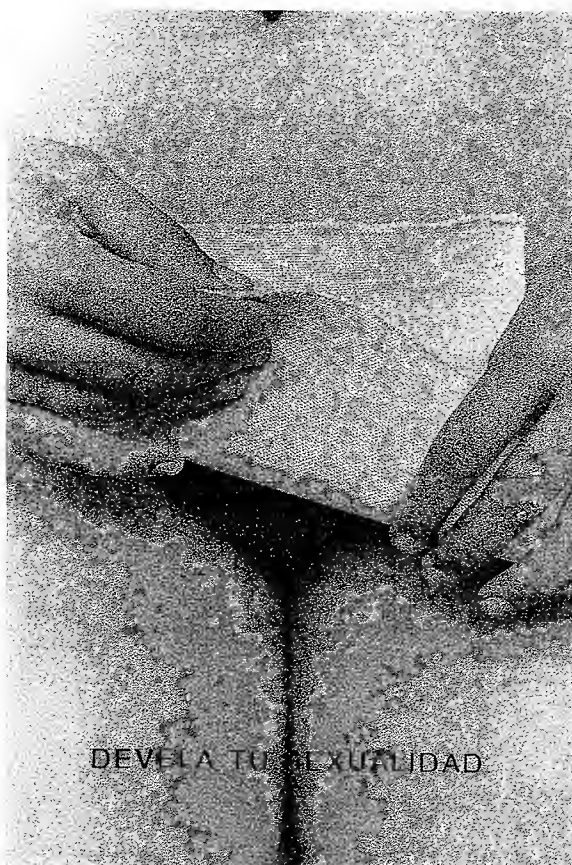
All of us women are the same.

We share our sudden bursts of pain.

A straight and narrow line  
connects us all into a single image.



PROCESA LA INFORMACION



DEVELA TU SEXUALIDAD

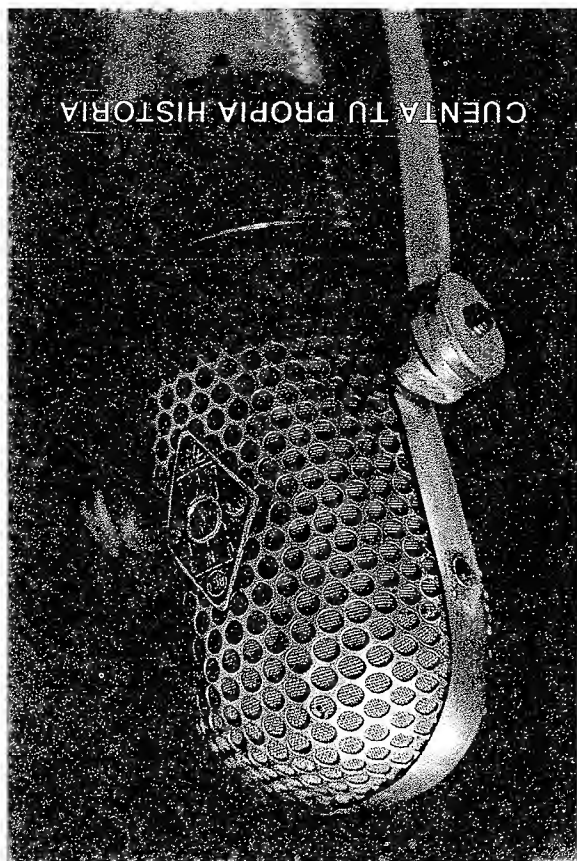


BUSCA TU IDENTIDAD

*How One Creates Art Today, 1991*  
b & w photographs.

Como Hacer Una Obra de Arte Hoy

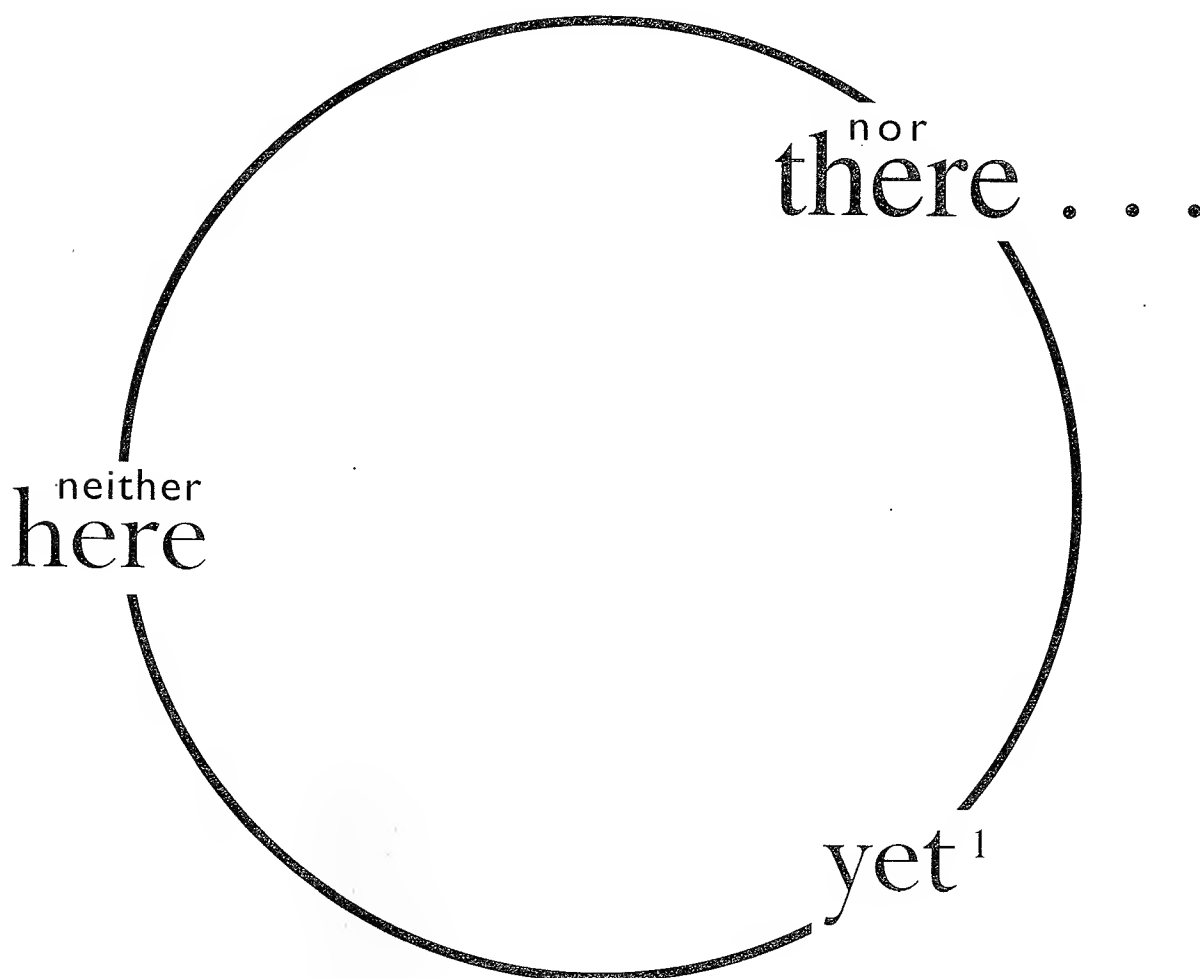
## CONSUELO CASTAÑEDA





HERESIES 92

*Bodily Function*



CELINA ROMANY

Whenever I am called upon to set forth intellectual analyses imbued with feeling and to write them down in English, I experience unease, defiance. Those feelings that ultimately make intellectual categories meaningful call for Spanish-only — at least for the moment. Maybe time spent in this country will see a Celina with bilingual dreams flourish. Maybe my maternal experience will enable me to give birth to a bilingual soul.

I surprise myself. During the last five years I have been in America's academia, using English to address topics that are dear to me, yet I have only now discovered that I am letting just a glimpse of light through a crack in my window and that it will be a while before I open it. I have discovered that my exposition is rather limited. Taking advantage of intellectual theories in vogue, I filter out a few drops of my own version. A Latin American woman born in a colony, who attempts to address her enlightened colonizers on their own turf and with their very own linguistic arsenal, I speak about the ravages of colonization. A close friend of mine reminds me that this has already been done. I don't reject that possibility, but as Fanon knew so well, a colonized mentality is a minefield, and the mines are hard to deactivate.

My Puerto Rican students in New York City confront me daily with the transcultured mentality of colonial migrants. The double burden with which they face racism in their daily lives has wounded them deeply. I am classified as an exotic bird, dressed in the attractive plumage of the role model they need in order to heal the deep pain of their migration. They feel proud of the recognition that the colonizers afford me. During my Jurisprudence class — a class predestined for the white élites from here — my students lavish gratitude on me when they realize that they too can think, that a critique of law arising out of their marginal experience counts very much indeed.

Postmodernism has dethroned essential identities, has turned them into archaeological material. With the dis-cove-ry of the subject's positionality we have entered a stage in which anything goes. To discuss oppressed/oppressors, with its concomitant binary oppositions, or to speak of linear cause-and-effect underestimates the complexity of economic and political relationships. From my self-imposed exile's position, I feel like a tropical creature, and now, from here, I attempt to make sense of my monolingual emotions while in my colonized schizophrenic psyche I sail on the colonizer's metropolitan waters guided by a bilingual intellect.

My privileged exile unfolds as a colonized woman's experience. It allows me to write my own version of *La Guagua Aerea* ("Midnight Airbus"), Luis Rafael Sanchez's excellent rendition of Puerto Rican migration. It confirms for me the experience of otherness best expressed in the experience of a woman born in the 1950s in a colony, the experience of being neither here nor there. It parts ways with its typical counterparts, since almost half of all Puerto Ricans reside outside their native Island. Mine is a privileged exile because it did not involve riding the Island's postwar migratory wave, when thousands of its children bailed out toward salvation from their misery under the slogan "Operation Bootstrap."

I do not wish to indulge in recounting the experiences of an affirmative action *brownie*, the many condescending looks cast by my fellow Latin Americans who fail to understand that Puerto Rico is a Caribbean nation with strong Latin American ties, or the astonishment of North American feminists who fail to grasp my persistent criticism of their universal premises about women, nor do I wish to linger on my Lone Ranger status in law school circles. Exotic adventures they are, and with them, a new field of wounds.

One thing at a time. Now that I am neither here nor there, I would rather address my other wounds, those I have in common with my Puerto Rican students without really sharing them — for instance, Mary-Lou-from-Ohio, a girl who moved into my neighborhood in 1958 and whom I can't seem to get off my mind. I remember Mary-Lou-from-Ohio befriending a child in the Catholic school her parents had chosen for its top-notch curriculum in English. Mary-Lou-from-Ohio's friend is a diligent student who receives good grades in English and communicates in street slang with a heavy Puerto Rican accent. She hates her accent and herself. Mary-Lou-from-Ohio's father, a general manager at Woolworth's, receives VIP treatment from Islanders. Ohio gains stature in a well-to-do neighborhood in Rio Piedras, and Mary-Lou-from-Ohio lands in its most luxurious house, built on a former sugarcane plantation that was eventually parceled up for the sake of a builder's profits — a foretaste of the Island's modernization.

**Being neither here nor there**, *the girl-woman who has a knack for languages and studies in U.S. centers of learning holds onto the remarkable accent with which she once talked to Mary-Lou-from-Ohio.*

**Being neither here nor there**, *the girl-woman learns about North America's heroes and their historic feats, with no mention of the history of resistance of her invaded country, even after years of that penetration known only to the rapist.*

**Being neither here nor there**, *she recalls her sexual awakening, a trapeze of mixed messages — dancing the pirouettes demanded by the liberal development of an American citizen, dealing all the while with the sexual repression demanded of Puerto Rico's young women.*

**Being neither here nor there**, *viewing the front-page photograph in the San Juan English-only newspaper, which depicted the oath-of-office ceremony of a new naval commander on assignment to the Island, accompanied by his doting wife showing off her wide-brimmed hat in the style of Princess Di, she remembers how much the commander resembled the big movie star who made mother-Celina swoon. He was a tall North American, blond and ethereal, stationed in the Island's best neighborhood, occupied by the United States Armed Forces.*



**Being neither here nor there,** *she tries to explain to her International Law students how Borinquen passed from the status of war booty to that of Free Associated State via an imposed American citizenship and how the occupied Island freely chooses (a situation that outside of legal mythology takes on dizzying connotations) a permanent union with the United States, with the nod of the United Nations. She tells of a "compact" through which the colony on the one hand and the metropolis<sup>2</sup> on the other reach an agreement that would provide the former its own limited form of government. The compact is ratified by a 1952 referendum in which the colonized people give their consent and approval to the constitution of the Estado Libre Asociado — a Free Associated State whose political structure dictates that all U.S. federal laws reign supreme and allow passage of local laws insofar as the latter do not conflict with the former, thus controlling the economy, international relations, labor relations, immigration, environmental policies, and so on.*

**Being neither here nor there,** *the repeated attempts to redefine the Estado Libre Asociado turn into a pitiful circus, culminating in the circus maximus featuring the plebiscite bill. The almighty U.S. Congress determines the rules of the game in a decision-making process that supposedly (and once again with the people's consent) would definitively decide its status in the sort of electoral climate that can prevail only on an island whose majority depends on federal public assistance — an electorate whose daily lives are best represented by an alarming set of statistics pertaining to alcoholism, drug addiction, and criminality, all of which give expression to a mounting process of social decay. The plebiscite will turn the country into either the 51st state, a refurbished Estado Libre Asociado, or an independent nation.*

**Being neither here nor there,** *those from over here clamor for a ticket to the circus with a passion that wilts in the struggle for participation in the American political process, which daily confirms their second-class citizenship, while those over there, staggering in the peculiar ambiguity brought on by colonial hurricane winds, claim the show is sold out.*

**Being neither here nor there,** *the circus maximus cancels its performance, forced by the resistance of metropolitan lawmakers who dread the idea of a possible state made up of Caribbean mulattos who defend their culture and language (a state that threatens to have more representatives in Congress than many other states, thereby doubling its qualifications for federal public assistance programs), or of an updated Estado Libre Asociado with tax privileges not enjoyed by other states, or of an independent country that would challenge U.S. military presence on the Island.*

**Being neither here nor there,** *the colonial supervisors of the day, who advocate a refurbished Free Associated State, strike back, shielded behind a smoke screen of cultural and nationalistic values, by formally establishing Spanish-only — that is to say, Spanish — as the official language of the Puerto Rican nation. Hispanophilia overtakes the Island, best represented by the Principe de Asturias, a prestigious Spanish literary prize awarded upon the approval of the Spanish-only legislation; by 90 percent of the government's TV programming coming from Spain; and by a million-dollar pavilion at the 1992 Seville Fair commemorating the Fifth Centennial of America's Discovery. This sentimentalized love of things Hispanic also represents the legacy of an antiseptic nationalism reluctant to get contaminated by the vital forms of resistance manifested by the popular culture of the nation's working classes.*

**Being neither here nor there,** *I tell my students here about sexism-in-the-colony, the Macondian relationships among a male metropolis, male colonizers, and colonized males, revealing the socialization for dependence and passivity felt by every female, which takes on special dimensions in the colonial setting. Mothers pass on the mess, and fathers transmit patriarchy's explosive tango alongside colonized otherness, provided these fathers have not already flown away. Domestic violence, the Dante-esque labyrinth in which colonized patriarchy ambulates, brings shame to Horkheimer's treatise on how the oedipal struggle, in its search for authority, is transferred to the sphere of public life. A surreal existence possesses even the liberation movements, which take on sexist overtones in full caudillo style. Feminist theory and practice, chock full of color, pattern, and design, threaten the superficial coherence of the liberation uniform.*

The positionality of liberation movements underscores the need to refer to postmodernist jargon, to the multiplicity of centers, to the intersection of the subject's positions. Dreams come in handy. Dreams of the neither-here-nor-there type are particularly telling, especially feminist ones. Take, for example, the recurring one in which I appear as a Caribbean alchemist, surrounded by independence leaders, caudillos, and patriarchs:

*I pass around what seems to be a potion with a strong mango taste. It enables me to become visible after many long hours of anxious invisibility. I speak. I underscore the complexities in dealing with gender subordination in the colony, pointing out how the feminism I claim can contribute to both the theoretical conceptualization and the praxis of the struggle for independence. I talk about the need for such reevaluation as well as about my personal lack of sympathy for a leadership that sets a patriarchal tone in both style and content. I articulate my apprehensions and fears with respect to life in postindependence, inquiring where we, daughters of the underclass generated by years as a Caribbean K-Mart showcase, would be. A leader-with-a-condescending-look replies by alluding to my conceptual misunderstanding. I ought to take stock of the fragile commitment of Puerto Rican feminists to the Island's independence. My fears are yet another instance of the disengagement typically manifested by privileged women intellectuals. In other words, I am looking for trouble. Male-inflicted trouble, I suppose.*

*With a little help from my mango potion, I appeal for the elimination of vulgar reductionist formulas, for the need to approach culture with the rigor its complexity merits — a complexity that, on the one hand, makes us recognize the need to systematically defend our nation's cultural values, while, on the other, demands their problematization, given their collaboration and complicity with patriarchy; a complexity that requires unmasking the unhappy marriage of patriarchy and cultural freedom. Just like other women on the planet, I have experienced (I go on talking deliriously, not even stopping to catch my breath, afraid that my potion will run its course and I will be consigned again to the realm of the invisible) culture and national values being routinely used to justify and legitimate oppression of the worst kind.*

*I remind them of the historical context, a fin de siècle in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to stage any liberation struggle, given the successfully packaged, undisputed victory of liberal capitalism. A high official makes a sour face, signaling the upcoming end of Operation Potion. I decide to color my speech with a selection of lullabies to slow down the return from what seems to be a collective hypnotic trance. In time with their sweet rhythms I ask how the Puerto Rican liberation project contemplates translating the personal into the political. I underline the necessity of broadening the theoretical/practical foundations, making them inclusive enough for those who repeatedly experience multiple subordination. I stress the need to elaborate either an inclusive script or scripts that interact and intersect with one another.*

Fortunately I am in the habit of waking up before being silenced once more. There is no doubt that at this stage of the game, the pieces of the puzzle that make up the colonized experience of a Puerto Rican woman have been fitted into place. Perhaps in the near future my neither-here-nor-there-ness will allow me to translate it all into a bilingual discourse.



<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was published in *Callaloo* 15:4 (1992): 1034–1038. Special thanks were given to Virginia Moore for her translation assistance.

<sup>2</sup> The term *metropolis* means the colonizing country.

Having lived in the United States since 1980, I was struck to discover upon my arrival that I am a Latina. I was born in São Paulo, Brazil, and from 1971 to 1978 was a political exile in Paris, where as a sociology student I was exposed to the ferment and speculation that resulted in what is today called postmodernist thinking. Are we once more getting trapped in what Roland Barthes used to call "the disease of thinking in essences"? I tend to perceive all these conceptual meanderings as laborious ways to escape the apparently unthinkable political perplexities of our time. I'm also stunned to see the extent to which artistic products tend to display themselves as the embodiment of a peculiar sort of linguistic consciousness looking to explore, identify, or manufacture signifiers of verbal discourse.

Women of my generation are survivors of many decades of exposure to a binary approach to critical thinking, a recent expression of which seems to be the opposition between essentialist and deconstructionist. It reminds me of the naive oppositions we used to contront in the past — theory vs. practice, material vs. spiritual, etc. — as though the essentiality of the world would lie in their resolution or synthesis. We'd better remind ourselves how these fragile and ephemeral dualistic novel- ties led in most cases to a well behaved nihilism that was never able to withstand the full consequences of its premises. Isn't it high time to dare to confront politics again? Shouldn't we be searching for a wholeness that is political in nature

and expresses itself through a vision of radical social reform and personal transformation? Our living space looks like a territory in which the clamor of words appears to be more frightening than all the possible ways to be silent.

To survive transplanting I first had to acknowledge myself as a woman in her forties and realize that aging is a place for struggle and discovery. I immersed myself in community art in order to work with evolving, marginalized urban communities through a process of participatory research. I had to make sense of the diversity of my cultural experiences and interrogate my childhood and my language for meaning. The work of women artists as well profoundly influenced my view of the world.

An important part of this process has been talking to younger artists, to whom I look to inform our mutual experiences of inventing/reinventing ourselves and our

edited by **MIRTES ZWIERZYNSKI**

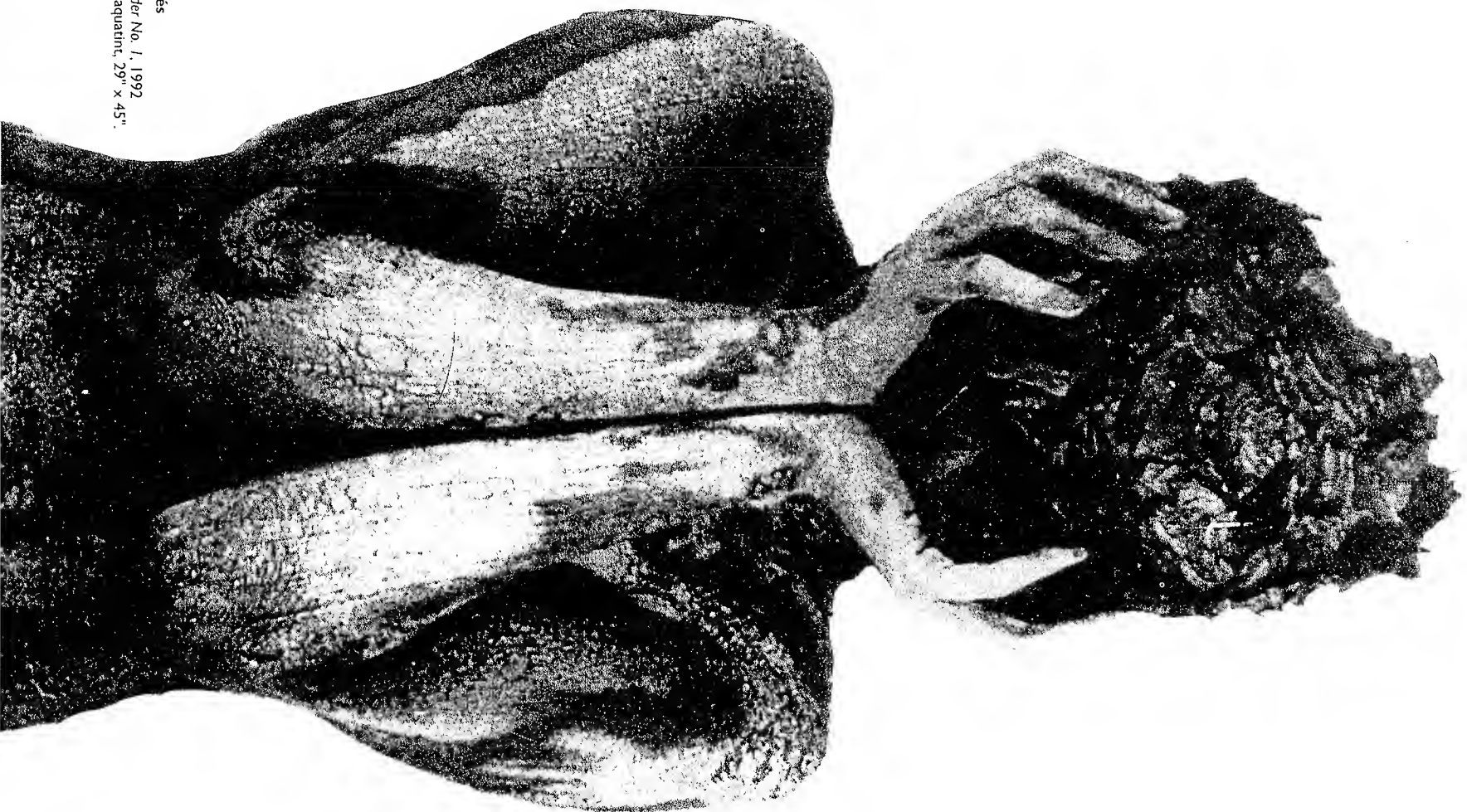
**MARILYN CORTÉS**

**MONTSERRAT ALSINA**

**BEATRIZ LEDESMA**

# Searching Sharing

shared commitment to struggle. For this issue of *Heresies* I have invited three such artists — Montserrat Alsina, Marilyn Cortés, and Beatriz Ledesma — to discuss their experiences as Latina artists involved in community work. There is certainly a generational gap between myself and them, a sort of ideological break with the way the world has been understood by women of my generation, whose perception and consciousness translated themselves into the language of the traditional left. We struggled to change History, while they are struggling to change daily life. Today they bring some of the same passion and urgency to working with and within communities in which empowerment is the issue, while I have had to de-ideologize myself and thoroughly relearn the importance of daily life and the way it translates itself through differences of age, race, and gender.



**Marilyn Cortés**

*Innocent Bystander No. 1, 1992*  
photo-etching, aquatint, 29" x 45"

## MARILYN CORTÉS

As with everything in American society today, I feel I'm just another minority, just another statistic. Here I am a Latina artist. I am considered a woman of color and a minority. I have been conveniently placed in these categories. Latinas are tossed in a "melting pot" with every other ethnic group in the U.S. today. Yes, we are women of color, but we are all different in every aspect of our lives.

Spanish is my connection to my Latina sisters — South American, Central American, Caribbean, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican — and that is only if we exclude Portuguese and all the indigenous dialects of the native peoples of these nations. Perhaps language is the only true link we have. Perhaps our true connection is in our struggle as minorities, as women artists defining our unique identities and our unique experiences in a society that insists on putting all of us in a mold.



**Marilyn Cortés**

*Innocent Bystander No. 2, 1992*  
photo-etching, aquatint, 29" x 45"

I define my cultural identity as Mexican American. My parents came from Mexico; I was born and grew up in Chicago. I speak English as a first language and Spanish as a second language. My cultural experiences have been many. From the moment my mother died I was a ward of the state. Between the ages of two and seven I lived in an orphanage. Between the ages of seven and ten I lived with a Jewish family, an Italian family, and a Puerto Rican family. My confrontation with my identity started with my foster families, and my association with my Mexican heritage began at age ten with my stepmother, who spoke no English.

Throughout my childhood I experienced cultural ambiguity. Being uprooted was traumatic each time it happened.

The images I use in my artwork represent my constant need to connect to my true beginnings, both spiritual and physical. My work becomes therapeutic because it allows me to confront my past and question my identity.

My need to connect with the Mexican community in Chicago is an obvious one. I have made a conscious effort to learn about my people and work within the community. Through my teaching art to Latino children I learn about their struggles, their dreams, and their need to identify. I see they have the same questions I had and still have. Through my work with the permanent collection of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum I am able not only to view but also to discuss works by other Mexican and Mexican American artists. All this is my inspiration, and it feeds my curiosity and my need to express myself visually.



Montserrat Alsina

Fragments: Combination 7, 1992  
linocut, 8" x 11"

## MONTSERRAT ALSINA



It was not until I arrived at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, after having been born in Venezuela and living in London, England, that I became aware of the meaning of the term *latino* and started to assimilate what it meant to be a latina here in the U.S.A. I saw the difference in treatment of my fellow people of color. I would hear comments like, "You'll get that job because you are a latina and a woman," which infuriated me because I see myself as more than that. I want to be looked at for what I can offer, not for my ethnic background and gender.

Latino culture, such as it exists in the U.S.A., does not influence my work. I am in search of showing the process of my inner explorations as a woman, as a human being. My self-imposed exile here has exposed me to a whole range of groups, such as the feminists, the Native Americans, the



**Montserrat Alsina**

*Fragments: Combination 2, 1992*  
linocut, 8" x 11".

truly needy, and the more well-to-do, that have influenced my work a great deal.

My historical background, my mestizo mother, my father who escaped from the Spanish Civil War, and their family history are the basis of my search for independence from the existing social consciousness, for spiritual awareness, and for my Self. I believe this has allowed me to create art.

Being involved with the latino community and with women's groups of all colors has facilitated a dialogue, a knowledge of other people's history. We get to compare common experiences, which makes us more conscious of who we are. Working with latino children at the Marwen Foundation has helped make me more aware of the oppression of the so-called minorities. I feel that these minority people are my family away from home.



**Beatriz Ledesma**

*Open Door in the Sky*, 1991, acrylic, 18" x 24".

I was born in Buenos Aires of parents who combined the European with the South American Indian. Both of them were singers; my father was also a carpenter. I was raised a Mennonite, which gave me a spiritual, social, and political consciousness at a very early age, as well as an understanding of community life as an important force for social change. From my parents I learned the power of conviction in action, the language of dreams and myths, and the importance of ritual and symbol.

## BEATRIZ LEDESMA

I do not see or make a separation between art and life. I became involved in art in the early 1970s as a way to protect my freedom of thought from the political and social repression going on in Argentina at that time. My artwork is a personal exploration into the realm of the self, motivated by existential questions such as how we become transformed and the effect of chaos and destruction on the emotional and mental life of an individual.

My way of thinking is increasingly intuitive and nonlinear, and it is strengthening my belief in transcending differences in order to attain significant change. Therefore, I am not interested in questions related to Latino culture and its differences. The social split of people on the basis of race or any other characteristic, I believe, is a game in a competitive system in which differences are used as weapons against one another instead of as complementary pieces of the big picture: the world. I believe that the real separations among all of us are those of class and gender: rich/poor man/woman.

Latin American lives are colored by constant economic, social, and political struggle and oppression; so are the lives of Blacks, Caucasians, Asians, and Native American Indians.

I connect myself with any community interested in empowering itself through art. Wherever there is a real need to be addressed is where I like to work. I see and feel myself changed by the mark that each community leaves on me, and of course my own artwork then changes as well.

At present the world needs a sense of wholeness, of the essential unity of all people, creatures, and growing things of the Earth. We need to restore the idea of the Great Ground before the linear "power over" mindset destroys life altogether. To me, this is what is important and imperative to look into and work for.



**Beatriz Ledesma**

*The Illumination of the Moon on the Water, 1993*  
acrylic, 36" x 36"

Photo: Bob Levy.

As two New York-based Latina artists frustrated and angered by the isolation, exclusion from exhibitions, misconceptions, and stereotyping facing Latina artists, we joined efforts in 1989 and put out a national call for slides and writing for an exhibition to be sponsored by the Women's Caucus for Art, which was holding its 1990 annual conference in New York City. More than one hundred Latina artists responded. The exhibition we had planned developed into two exhibitions plus a bilingual poetry reading. Later that year we mounted a third exhibition. The response from our audiences was exhilarating, and we began to get attention from other artists as well as art administrators.

To date Vistas Latinas has presented eight exhibitions in the New York area, in both alternative spaces and museums. We have chosen to work in a self-determined way rather than to become co-opted and appropriated by a faddish mainstream.

Latinos are a hybrid people whose backgrounds are rich with a mixture of many cultures. Yet the stereotyping we encountered assumed that Latinos were a homogeneous group and that our work fit into categories predesignated for the art of a handful of already accepted Latino artists, mostly male and mostly dead.

We knew it would be imperative in 1992 to add our Latina voices to the quincentenary observances. Although many of us have cultural connections with Europe, we also have a strong identification with the indigenous people of the Americas because our roots are here as well. Thus has been engendered an inclusive Latino culture, one that allows for diversity.

Four venues were offered to Vistas Latinas for a series of exhibitions we called *Adios, Columbus*. We successfully curated and mounted three of the shows. The fourth, an installation designed for the Windows Above the Circle site at New York Institute of Technology's Manhattan campus, was in effect censored. The imagery of the two artists, Ana Ferrer and Kukuli Velarde, was so strong in its viewpoint, so committed to the reporting of the historical fact of genocide, that before the installation had been completed, the dean at the Institute ordered that the work be dismantled.

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# L A T I N A S

Vistas Latinas is now in litigation to ensure that the work be seen as intended and that NYIT, which had entered into a contract with the artists, be made to honor its obligation to exhibit the work uncensored.

Our original purpose having been to bring visibility to Latina artists, Vistas Latinas has become a project involving not only artists but also art historians and curators. The response from Latina art professionals has been extremely supportive, yet we have encountered a reluctance on the part of a few artists to be included in all-women or all-Latina shows. Given all that has occurred in the last two decades, do these artists really believe that not identifying as Other will improve their chances for recognition or that identifying as Other will stigmatize them? They may believe the myth that an artist will be judged solely by the "quality" of her work and that she doesn't need the support of a community of Latinas and artists, but politics, networking, and socializing — as in other professions — have much to do with who benefits in the art world.

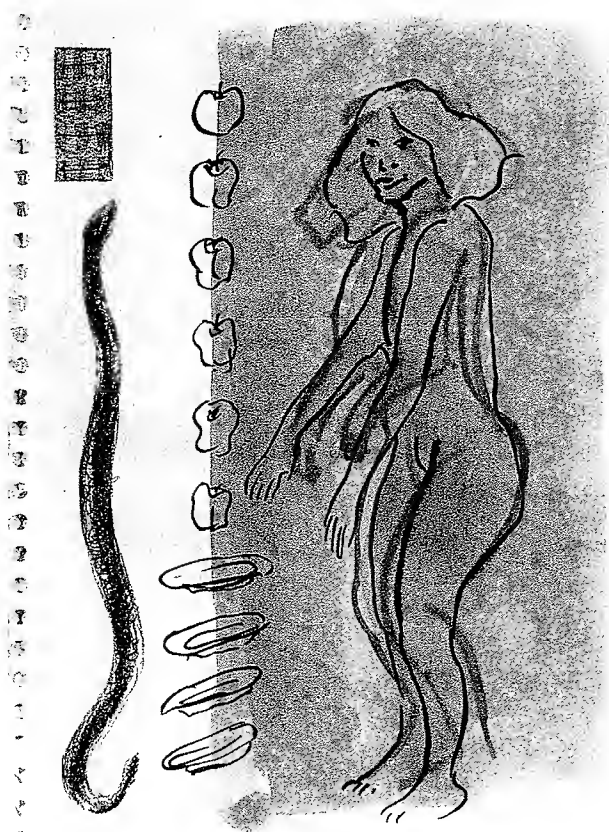
There are also the few who will use an organization and its opportunities when it is fashionable and convenient to be associated with it — in this case, as a Latina artist. They use the group to advance themselves but seldom nurture the group in return. Our philosophy is that, in the long run, group identity and shared experiences are more empowering than the gains of the individual. In the larger society, classism, sexism, and individualism are means of promoting and ensuring the success of a select few women, who are supported financially and socially by a patriarchal system. But for the majority of Latina artists, who neither have nor want access to such support, grassroots organizing is a more realistic approach to empowerment. Most participants in Vistas Latinas exhibitions are working-class, many were raised poor, and about half are lesbians. We find ourselves unable to partake of the success that is more likely to be enjoyed by heterosexual women of the privileged classes, so the support we give one another does contribute to the courage we need to go on with our work.

*Regina Araujo Corritore & Miriam Hernández*





Idaljiza Liz *Untitled*, 1989, sepia-toned photograph.



Alicia Porcel de Peralta *Beware of Dogs*, 1992, ink on paper, 11" x 14".

## An Invitation to the "Other America"\*

Maria Mar

Who discovered America? The Arahucos, Tainos, Caribes, Mayas, Incas, Hopis, Sioux, Mohawk, Creeks, Cherokees, Iroquois, and all the other Native Americans got here first. "What Columbus really discovered was... an old world, long populated by numerous and diverse peoples with cultures as distinct, vibrant, and worthy as any to be found in Europe . . . Only recently, in fact, have we come to realize that what Columbus did in 1492 was to link two old worlds, creating one new world," suggest Carolyn Margolis and Herman Viola in *Seeds of Change*, published in 1991 by the Smithsonian.

The tragedy of warfare is that in the meeting of two worlds, the one that has spent more time training for destruction usually wins and proceeds to wipe out, devalue, and steal from the creative work of the defeated. So it was in the First Invasion of the Americas, also known as the Discovery or the Conquest. The Europeans did not understand the value of the cultures they had found. Many did not see the Indians as people (dehumanizing the Other is a prerequisite for prejudice, and prejudice is a tool for exploitation). Convinced of the inferiority of the "savages'" culture and of the barbarity of their religion, the Europeans found justifications for the massacre of the natives, the plundering of their resources, and the devastation of their environment.

This seems all too familiar to any Latino in the U.S. We have been the victims of the Second Invasion of the Americas. It is the belief in our inferiority — this time under the name of underdevelopment — that justifies military invasion, political interference, and the scavenging of our natural and human resources. When, drained and persecuted, we then move to this country, we are seen as outsiders who have come to take away the work and benefits of the "American" workers — as if we were not American too. (Everyone seems to forget about South and Central America, about the Caribbean, and, even in North America, about Canada as well.)



Just as the Europeans ignored the achievements of the Indians and could not even imagine that the Indians could offer them anything of aesthetic or cultural value, we Latinos are faced with a mainstream that ignores our contributions, steals our innovations, and blocks our progress — all in the name of Old World values. This country seems to forget that it once called itself the New World. It is like a young girl who, upon waking each morning, steals a look at herself in her aged stepmother's mirror. After a while, she sees in the mirror not her own image, but rather she sees the image of the old woman.

We are the New America, the descendants of the two old worlds colliding — yet it was more than two. In our veins run Africa, Europe, and

Native America, but many other races and cultures have found their way into our blood as their legacy was passed on to us. In my altar of the goddesses I have a Catholic statue of Caridad del Cobre, whose Yoruba name is Ochun. I have an African Yemaya, and I also have Oya, a woman warrior, one of the Yoruba orishas — which are called Santos by the Latinos, for African slaves in the Caribbean were forbidden to carry out their religious practices and learned to fuse the images of their Orishas with those of the Catholic saints. But Oya is also Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war. My aunt Fanny, who knows nothing about these cultures, gave it to me. She loved the way the woman stood tall and dignified, “*con to’ los hierros*” (“with all she has”). This syncretism is not atypical of the

**Miriam Hernández**  
*Hola Lolita*, 1991.

Photo: Sarah Lewis.

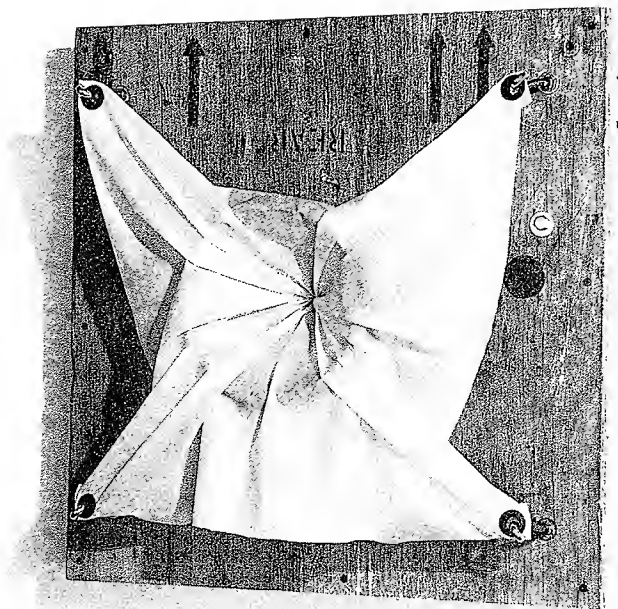
Caribbean, but my altar brings me back to other roots, not only the racial and cultural ones. My gender, too, has its history — herstory, if you prefer.

This, then, is the history of the “other America,” made the more invisible under the layers of invisibility put upon us through racial, cultural, and national oppression. *Vistas Latinas* offers Latin American women artists an opportunity to present an old culture still waiting to be discovered: the experience of womanhood in the New World. Each work is like an island, and as the viewer navigates the oceanic space joining and separating them, perhaps she will find, as did the European “discoverers,” that beneath the vast diversity of the islands, there is a common vision intrinsic to a continent.

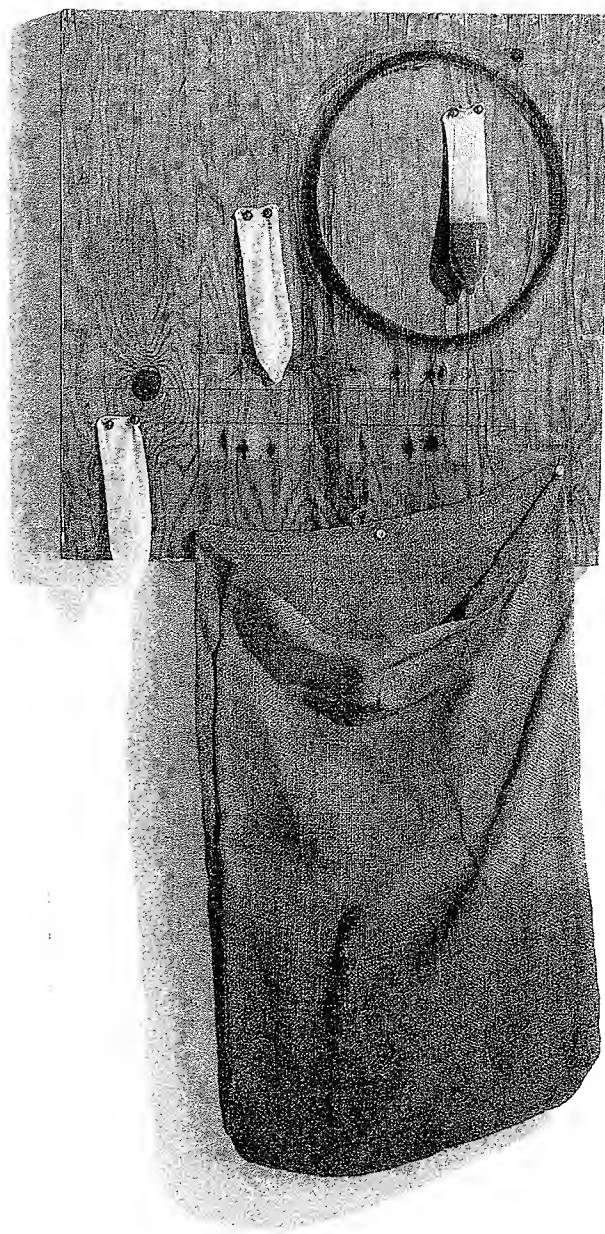
\* adapted from catalogue essay for *Adios, Columbus*.



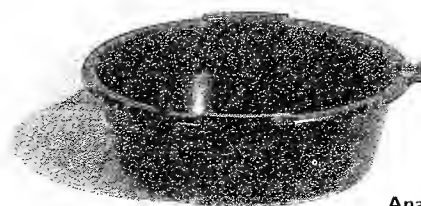
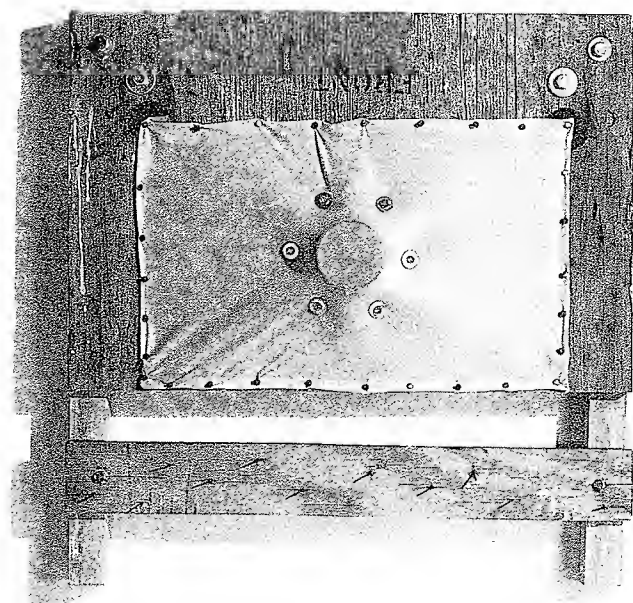
Regina Araujo Corritore  
*Adios Columbus*, 1992  
Photo: Christine Parry 7+3



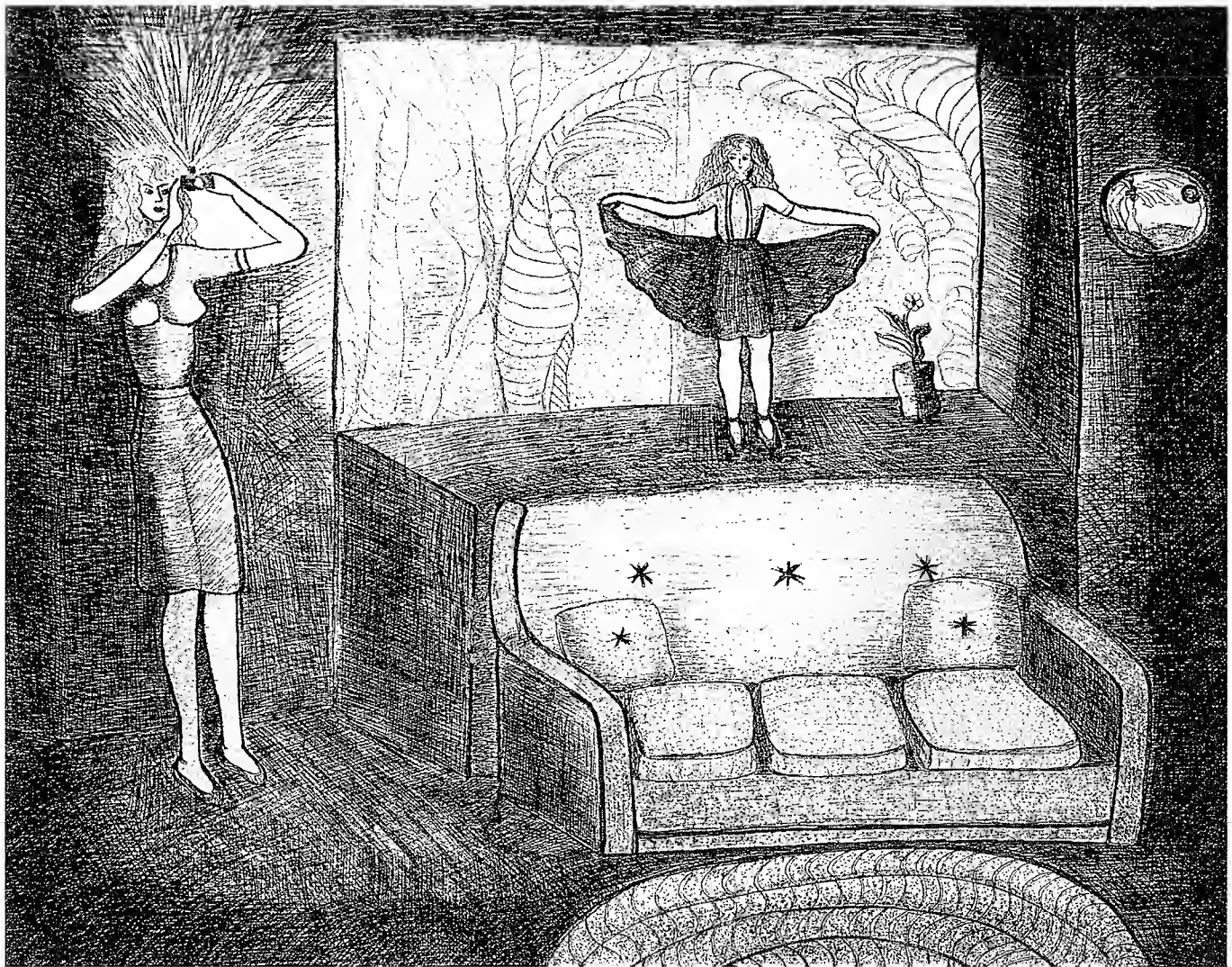
Ana Ferrer *Safer Sex series: Rear*, 1993.



Ana Ferrer *Safer Sex series: Front*, 1993.



Ana Ferrer  
*Safer Sex series: untitled*, 1993.



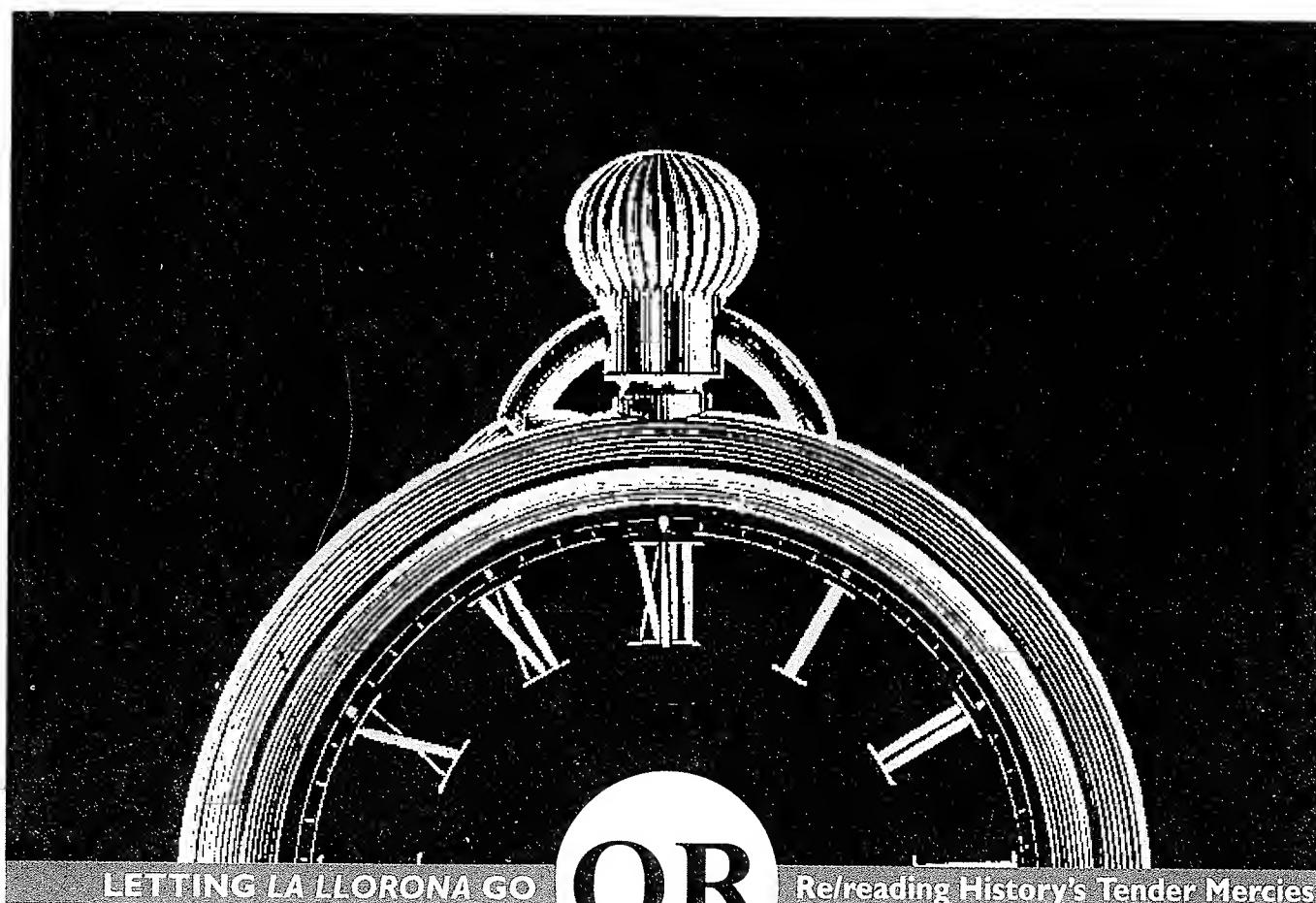
Elaine Soto *Memory*, 1985, etching, 20" x 26".

From 1990 to 1993, the following artists have shown their work in Vistas Latinas exhibitions:

Emma Alvarez Piñeiro  
 Maritza Arrastia  
 Miriam Basilio  
 Dina Bursztyn  
 Maria Carmen  
 Josely Carvalho  
 Martha Chavez  
 Regina Araujo Corritore  
 Esperanza Cortés  
 Ada Pilar Cruz  
 Aurora Dias-Jorgensen  
 Carlota Duarte  
 Carolina Escobar  
 Ana Ferrer  
 Tina Fuentes

Lorena Garcia-Jojola  
 Maria Elena González  
 Elizabeth Grajales  
 Marina Gutiérrez  
 Claudia Hernández  
 Jo Ann Hernández  
 Miriam Hernández  
 Beatriz Kohn  
 Idaljiza Liz  
 Inverna Lockpez  
 Silvia Malagrino  
 Maria Mar  
 Cristina Martínez  
 Madeleine Michele

Delilah Montoya  
 Maritza Mosquera  
 Lillian Mulero  
 Gloria Ortiz  
 Veronica Paiz  
 Alicia Porcel de Peralta  
 Liliana Porter  
 Elena Presser  
 Bernadette Rodríguez  
 Carmen Sanchez  
 Fanny Sanin  
 Elaine Soto  
 Marisella Veiga  
 Kukuli Velarde  
 Doris Vila



LETTING LA LLORONA GO

OR

Re/reading History's Tender Mercies

Killing one's children is generally considered a depraved violation of parental love and responsibility. Like incest, murdering one's offspring is universally abhorred as a concept even if the taboo has been violated with astonishing frequency throughout history (René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 77). Indeed, it is that violation which, at least in part, gave rise to the taboo. In what are still the rare cases in recent decades of mothers killing their children, insanity is automatically assumed and usually proven to explain the horror.

How paradoxical, then, that one of the most vigorous folk legends among Mexicans and Mexican Americans — people whose cultures place high premium on *mi madre*, *la familia* y *el hogar* (mother, family, and home) — is the story of *La Llorona*, the Weeping Woman who kills (or, in some versions, abandons) her children and forever after wanders the world in punishing anguish for her sins.

The mythic Weeping Woman of Mexican-Chicana/o<sup>1</sup> culture, *La Llorona* is, along with the Virgin of Guadalupe, arguably the most persistent and well-known *mestizo* folk leg-

end to have emerged from the era of the Spanish Conquest of Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) in 1521. Many historians and folklorists consider the indigenous woman *La Malinche*, who was given by her chief to the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés, as the historical source for *La Llorona*.

Growing up in New Mexico in the 1940s and 1950s, four hundred years after the Conquest, I heard stories of *La Llorona* that are still told today, persisting even in the era of "boy toy" Madonnas, Murphy Browns, and a few Gloria Molinas, although the tale's power to scare may have become weakened by the commonplace fact of mass murders and child abuse. What explains the paradox and persistence of this tale even in the late twentieth century? Does the bone-chilling impact of her story on impressionable young minds make it indelible? Surely what I was told about her when I was a child is unforgettable.

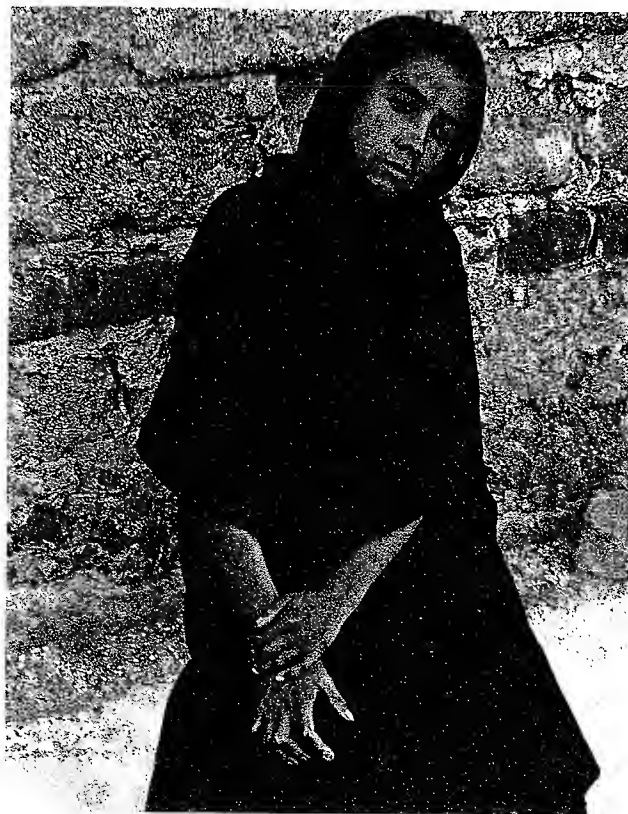
I recall my mother struggling to raise eight children almost singlehandedly (my father nearly always worked out of town) and using *La Llorona* as a very effective disciplinary

CORDELIA CANDELARIA

instrument. She would warn us, usually in Spanish, to “settle down and behave, or La Llorona will come and get you. Listen, I think I hear her outside . . .” Her voice would drift off softly, eerily, and we would immediately cease our rambunctious behavior, look toward the windows and doors, and strain to hear what I clearly remember as the awful *bruja*’s plaintive moaning. Is it imagination or memory (or both) that recalls the childhood terror? “She’s missing her babies and crying again, and she needs someone *just like you* to take with her. And remember, she’s not going to put up with what I do, uh-uh, she’ll drown you too, just like that [snap!] — like she drowned her own babies.” Invariably effective, the ominous threat of the unseen Llorona lurking dangerously outside quieted our fussing, because we didn’t want the *brujamala* to hear us and realize that, just behind a flimsy door, sat desirable children for the taking. Later on, it occurred to me that she wouldn’t have been interested in brats like us anyway, but in my preschool innocence I could think of us only as very easy prey, for surely, in her annoyance with our behavior, Mamá wouldn’t even have bothered to save us.

Other versions of the always evolving legend were at hand as we grew up and struggled for independence and self-identity. Of course, as adolescents we no longer believed Mamá’s “superstitious crap,” as we became aware of what I now call, *con cariño*, my mother’s strategic, if Machiavellian, methods of kid control and self-preservation. Yet those grown-up versions of La Llorona stay with me today as vividly as the others. One tawdry form tells of a teenage girl who, disobeying her parents, sneaks away to a dance, is seduced by a handsome stranger, and becomes pregnant. Aghast at her condition, she conceals it until the child is born; then in fright and shame she drowns her baby, runs away, and is doomed to the eternal, tearful Llorona search. Another variation has as its antihero a young, pretty, and very lonely mother whose husband is stationed in Korea. Succumbing to temptation, she leaves her children untended to indulge in a night on the town. When she returns, the children have disappeared. Ashamed to face her family and husband, she spends the rest of her life crying and searching for her kidnapped and/or murdered babies.

As an adult I have often exchanged Llorona tales with other Chicanas/os in usually good-humored, though hardly mock, amazement at our parents’ retrograde child-rearing tactics. One familiar rendering, whose sexist subtext is particularly blatant, involves a poor *mestiza* (half-Indian, half-Spanish



**Tina Modotti**

*Mexican Woman, Elisa*, 1924  
platinum print, 8 7/8" x 6 3/4"

The Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Edward Weston.

woman) who falls in love with an aristocratic *criollo* (Mexican-born Spaniard) who, going against social convention, also falls in love with her. Although social mores prevent their marrying, he keeps her and their children in a house away from his people until the time comes when he must adhere to tradition and marry an acceptable *criolla*. Understandably broken-hearted, angry, and overcome with passion, the *mestiza* drowns their children in a well and then commits suicide. When her soul appears in heaven in search of her children, now angels, she is expelled and condemned to earth to roam, childless and crying in eternal torture for her unpardonable sins. The tale ends there, as of course it must to serve its function as populist propaganda intended to reinforce the patriarchy. Presumably the highborn macho lives happily ever after with his proper family, but even if he doesn’t, the key point is that *he* is the one who lives — not she or the children — without permanent social stigma for his conduct.

No longer frightening to me or anyone I know, young or old, La Llorona nonetheless still evokes my intense passion,

hence this article and accompanying poem. She makes me laugh when I'm not crying, makes me screamingly angry when I'm not mute in sorrow at the remarkable efficacy of brute social power to define the terms of its perpetuation. The phallic propaganda of this folklore's face value are as obvious — and, in some versions, as banal — as tabloid headlines. On its face it teaches that girls get punished for conduct for which men are rewarded; that pleasure, especially sexual gratification, is sinful; that female independence and personal agency create monsters capable of destroying even their offspring; that children are handy pawns in the revenge chess of female jealousy; and other lessons of scapegoat morality.

Like Greek mythology's Medea, who also bears the stain of evil for maternal infanticide resulting from her love for a man who leaves her, La Llorona and her historical prototype, La Malinche, have served as convenient crucibles for their cultures' coming to terms with conquest, sexual desire, incest, and the double-sided nature of love/hate. Seen as a scapegoat and a crucible, the Llorona legend begs for reconsideration and possible recuperation from what, in another context, historian Emma Perez calls inside *el sitio y la lengua* (the space and language) of the female subject, rather than from a dominant/dominating male perspective. But can even such an enlightened viewpoint save the Weeping Woman? Does she even deserve a new image?

the Weeping Woman of Mexican legend, is considered by many historians and folklorists as the mythic form of the historical woman La Malinche (also known as Doña Marina, Malinalli, and Malintzin), who was given by her chief to assist Hernán Cortés in what resulted in his conquest of Mexico in 1519–21. The hundreds of variants of the Llorona tale share a kernel plot: as punishment for her misconduct a young, usually beautiful woman is condemned to wander (often by rivers and other bodies of water) forever crying, unloved, and homeless, in grief-stricken search for her lost chil-

dren. Variants differ as to the nature of her offenses, but they usually include adultery, infanticide, or child neglect, and sometimes homicidal revenge, excessive hedonism, and self-indulgence as well. Often told as a *bruja* (witch) or ghost tale to coerce obedience from misbehaving children (e.g., she will steal them to replace the babies she drowned) and overly independent adolescent girls (e.g., her agony will be theirs if they do not repress their sexual longings), the tale has been recorded for centuries, and it is reported throughout Mexico and Americaztlán (that is, in the United States wherever Mexican Americans

Yes, I think it's past time for her to cut her hair, put on her Nikes and tie-dyed T-shirt, and get a life — at least, that's how I would re-image her. So transformed, she would learn a new walk to replace the head-down, bent-over crouch she's been doing for 400 years, and in the breezy, in-charge manner of artist Yolanda M. López's twenty-first century Chicanas, she would lead the radicals in organizing the quinquennial protests marking *La Conquista de Mejico* in 2021.

The first thing to stress in recuperating La Llorona for the next century is that she and La Malinche received an especially bum his/torical rap. As Adelaida R. Del Castillo's 1974 article (in *Encuentro Femenil*) and my own 1975 study on La Malinche (in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 1980) have established, there is no valid historical basis for *malinchismo*, the harsh Mexican concept of betrayal that emerged in the nineteenth century and that bears her name. Women didn't have the political or military power to win or lose Mesoamerica to the Spaniards. Thus the image of La Malinche as traitor and whore, which gave rise to the Llorona folk legend and which was memorialized by, among others, muralist José Clemente Orozco and Nobel poet Octavio Paz in *Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), lacks legitimacy except as a reflection of masculinist versions of power.

But why try to save the baby-killer of legend? Aren't there better uses of time and political resources than to try to recu-

reside; originally Aztlán was the name of the mythological northern homeland of Mesoamerican ancestors, analogous to the Garden of Eden, a myth borrowed in the 1960s by Chicana/Chicano activists eager to recover indigenous roots). La Llorona and her historical prototype, La Malinche, have been interpreted as emblematic of the vanquished condition and reputed fatalism of Mexico and its people.

Adapted from Cordelia Candelaria's entry "La Llorona" for *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*.



perate such a hopeless, worthless case? One very important reason is that the same brush that painted the Weeping Woman portrait in history continues to apply its demeaning brushstrokes of single-minded misogyny to contemporary society. It's past time *that* brush got a thorough cleaning and a fresh set of primary paints to color women authentically en route to the twenty-first century.

In addition, the tale's tenacity within and among *el pueblo* cannot be ignored. A major reason for its persistence is that La Llorona's act of infanticide and/or child abandonment has multiple interpretations that have been overlooked or forgotten. For instance, the legend can be interpreted fruitfully as a "tender mercy," a concept from biblical folklore suggesting that within a corrupt system of authoritarian power, even an act of compassion can be brutal because it, too, partakes of the dominant context of corruption. The tale can thus be read as political euthanasia, a woman's conscious attempt to save her cherished children from their parents' awful fate. Like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which infanticide is presented as a slave mother's desperate act of protection to save her daughter from slavery, La Llorona persists in folklore because its meanings are multiple, not one-dimensional, and they have the capacity to expose the very injustices that a superficial reading of the tale seems to prefer. In this vein, folklore scholar José Limón argues that "La Llorona [is] a symbol that speaks to the course of Greater Mexican [and Chicana/o] history and does so for women in particular, but through the idiom of women [it] also symbolizes the utopian longing [for equality and justice] of the Greater Mexican folk masses" (*Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History*, 1990, p. 413).

Yolanda M. López *Guadalupe series: Tableau Vivant*, 1978. Photo: Mogul.

Whether or not the iconography of folklore's Weeping Woman can be rehabilitated by radical poets, artists, and intellectuals and re/visited as a resisting woman (like Antigone, Sor Juana, Anne Hutchinson, Morrison's Sethe, and even Hillary Rodham-C.), today the La Llorona tale can be interpreted as a woman's brave choice to will her own destiny by electing a tragic fate rather than allow herself and her children to live under the inescapable tyranny of masculinist privilege and authoritarian despotism. Usually when men perform such deeds they're called heroes, especially if — as kings, presidents, and generals — they kill thousands of *other* people's children on battlefields. It is finally time to let go of a single, narrow understanding of the tale and to see La Llorona instead as an always evolving emblem of gender, sexuality, and power — and, too, as another female victim of *history's* tender mercies.

<sup>1</sup> For gender inclusiveness, the term "Chicanas/ Chicanos" is used here interchangeably with "Mexican Americans" even though it usually suggests a more politically progressive social consciousness than the latter. For brevity, "Chicana/o" and the plural form "Chicanas/os" are used.

Coatlícue / Las Colorado  
La Llorona, 1990.  
Photo: Jean Claude Vasseux.



## *La Llorona: Portrait by the River* Cordelia Candelaria

*La luz es todo: light is crucial.  
Its tawny hues the weight of dusk  
Sifted by random shreds of a retreating sun.  
The soft curves of el río's current  
Fills the early evening like thick brushstrokes  
Of a watercolor drying darkest blue.  
The splash of ripples  
As she bends to rinse tired feet  
Paint her flesh an instant shine  
Bright as tears. Or hope.*

*persistent footsteps 'round every shore  
de Tehuantepec a Chapala  
de Campeche a Culiacán  
del río al río, del calor al frío  
lavando llorando andando*

*The reticence of her slow movements  
Remembers the tons of sleepless time  
Pressed upon her weary flesh from shore  
To shore. Bony hands press feeling, slowly,  
Into each toe one by one.  
Fingertips damp back stray wisps of hair,  
Loose threads of gray on a tight weave of black  
Blending into the night.  
Slow motion inscribes, too, a final image.*

*Each haunted glance  
She sinks into river's reflection  
Returns her babies outstretched hands to her,  
Shivering cold and wet:  
la hambre eterna.*

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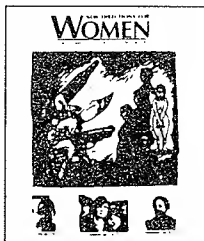
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the successful settlement of our recent lawsuit.

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## Notes on Contributors\*

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**Montserrat Alsina:** Born in Venezuela 1962. Lived in London, England. Got my MFA in performance at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I teach art at a private school full-time.

**Elia Arce** is a conceptual and performance artist working in film and installation. Toured with Bread and Puppet Theater and codirected and performed with the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD). She was raised in Costa Rica and has lived in the U.S. for 11 years.

**\*Santa Barraza** co-founded Mujeres Artistas del Surcoeste, a nonprofit Chicana/Latina visual art organization. She presently teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1994 Chicago's Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum will present a retrospective of her work.

**Miriam Basilio**, born in Puerto Rico, is pursuing a Ph.D. in art history at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU. She is a curatorial assistant at El Museo del Barrio.

**Dina Bursztyn** is a sculptor, writer, printmaker, among other things. She was born in Mendoza, Argentina, and lives in NYC.

**Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons** is a Cuban artist presently living in Boston. Her work addresses issues related to history, race, gender, family. She is the recipient of the 1993-94 Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe.

Author of over 60 published titles including *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (1986) and *Seeking the Perfect Game: Baseball in American Literature*. **Cordelia Candelaria** is a tenured full professor in the English Dept. at Arizona State University.

**Josely Carvalho:** Brazilian-born poet, visual artist, and activist currently living in New York.

**Consuelo Castañeda:** Nació en la Habana 1958. Estudió en el Instituto Superior de Arte 1977-1982. Luego trabaja como profesora en el mismo Instituto hasta 1987. Actualmente trabaja como artista en Miami.

**\*Mary Garcia Castro:** Brazilian-born sociologist and poet who has lived in the U.S. for many years. She presently holds a Rockefeller Foundation grant.

Hortensia & Elvira Colorado (Chichimec) actors/storytellers/writers, founding members of *Coatlicue/Las Colorado* Theatre Company, educate & entertain through personal story weaving family histories, political, social, cultural & sexual issues affecting Native women.

**Regina Araujo Corritore:** I am a sculptor who works in steel, an artist activist who co-founded Vistas Latinas and is on the steering committee of Coast to Coast.

**Marilyn Cortés:** Born in Chicago 1963. of Mexican parents. Received MFA from School of the Art Institute at Chicago 1991. I teach art to Latino children for the Marwen Foundation and also work for Mexican Fine Art Center Museum as assistant permanent collection manager.

**Ada Pilar Cruz:** Sculptor working in New York. She works as an artist-in-the-schools and at community colleges and is a member of Vistas Latinas.

**Pura Cruz:** Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico — came to New York as a toddler — raised and educated in the U.S.A.

**Cristina Emmanuel** is a painter & mixed-media artist who has recently lived in San Francisco, Calif. and San Juan, Puerto Rico. She has exhibited her work extensively in the United States, the Caribbean & Europe.

**Vanessa Fernandez:** I am 18 years old, attend High School of Fashion Industries, and still live with my mother (Esperanza Lara).

**\*Ileana Fuentes** is assistant director of the Latino Center at Rutgers University in NJ.

**Ana Ferrer:** As a Cuban born artist my work has sometimes been a personal diary, providing a venue for all the different voices within me.

**Coco Fusco** is a New York based writer, curator and media artist.

A Ph.D. candidate in performance studies at NYU, performance/visual artist **Guadalupe Garcia-Vásquez** is currently exploring Afro-Mexican cultural traditions in the Atlantic and Pacific coastal regions of Mexico.

**Martha E. Gimenez:** I was born in Argentina where I studied law & sociology Ph.D. in sociology UCLA 1973. Now associate professor in Dept. of Soc. at Univ. of Colorado at Boulder. Has written numerous articles & book chapters on Marxist theory, feminist theory & race/ethnic relations.

**Maria Elena González:** Fongo le dio a borondongo, borondongo le dio a bembave, bembave le pegó a puchilanga le hechó burundanga y le hincha los pies.

**\*Dolores Guerrero-cruz:** Born in Rocky Ford, Colorado; has lived in Los Angeles for 25 years. Involved with Self-Help Graphics and Art, an East L.A. community arts center dedicated to Latino art.

**Marina Gutiérrez,** born 1954, lives and works in New York. In addition to making art and working on public art projects, she teaches art and is director of the Cooper Union Saturday Program for teenagers.

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**Claudia Hernández:** Art historian specializing in Latin American art & issues.

**Ester Hernández:** I was born and raised on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. For 20 years I have been committed to visually depicting the dignity, strength, experiences and dreams of Chicanas through printmaking and pastels.

**Michelle Hernandez:** I am from Trinidad and would like to use art in my future career.

**Miriam Hernández:** Born in Puerto Rico, began training as an artist in NYC in 1961. Co-founder and co-curator of Vistas Latinas, an organization of Latina artists; and steering committee member of Coast to Coast National Women Artists of Color.

**Maria Hinojosa:** Award winning TV & radio journalist. Originally from Mexico City, she reports for National Public Radio and is the host of a local TV show about Latinos in NYC.

**Beatriz Ledesma:** MAAT from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Argentine-American living in Chicago since 1982, teaches art, practices art therapy, and gives lectures & workshops on the healing power of art.

**Susana Torruella Leval:** Art historian and curator of contemporary art. Currently chief curator at El Museo del Barrio, NYC, & Manhattan's representative on board of Metropolitan Museum of Art. From 1985-87 was chief curator of Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art in SoHo. Came to NY from Puerto Rico in 1970.

**Ana Linnemann** is a Brazilian sculptor and designer who now lives in New York.

\*The photographer **Idaljiza Liz**, born in the Dominican Republic, recently left New York City because of lack of work and moved to Paris, where she quickly found success.

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Artistic Director of INTAR Latin American Gallery, former president of National Association of Artists' Organizations. Native of Cuba, came to U.S. 1968. Recipient of an NEA grant, two Creative Artist Program Services, and two Cintas Fellowships.

The grandparents of **Yolanda M. López** came to the U.S. from Mexico in 1918. YL is currently visiting lecturer in painting at Calif. College of Arts and Crafts, and teaches drawing in Art Practice Dept. at UC Berkeley.

**Consuelo Luz** produces & hosts the daily nationally syndicated Spanish radio program "Buscando la Belleza." Other work includes recordings of her poetry and songs, tin sculpture, adult and children's musical theater and a novel-in-progress in Santa Fe.

**Maria Mar** is a writer-actress-director. She was born in Puerto Rico and resides in New York City since 1978. She has written & performed numerous plays & poems on women, gender issues and domestic violence.

**Hanoi Medrano:** I'm 16, I'm a student at Fashion Industries High School and at Cooper Union in the Saturday Program.

**\*Ana Mendieta**, a Cuban-born artist, activist and feminist, lived and worked in New York and Rome. She died in 1985.

**Raquelín Mendieta:** Cuban born artist, residing in New York State, arrived in the USA in 1961 with sister, Ana, as part of the "Peter Pan Project." Lived in Iowa for 14 years and studied art at the University of Iowa.

Born 1943, **Amalia Mesa-Bains** is an installation artist who has pioneered the Chicano altar tradition in contemporary art. She is a MacArthur Fellow and internationally known artist.

**\*Tina Modotti** (1896-1942) was born in Italy, acted in several Hollywood movies, lived and photographed in Mexico with Edward Weston, worked and traveled extensively for the Communist party, was in Spain in 1939 during the civil war, and died in Mexico.

**Lillian Mulero** has exhibited her work at Feature, Artists Space, Intar, and Grey Art Galleries in NYC as well as in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco.

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**Alejandria Perez:** I'm twenty years old, go to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, am taking Art Ed.

**Alicia Porcel de Peralta:** Born in Cordoba, Argentina in 1959; moved to New York in 1990. Studied at Universidad Nacional de Cordoba, degree in Art Education. Also worked in film, projection shows & installations.

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**Celina Romany** is a poet, painter, journalist, and feminist theorist & activist in movement for Latino/a rights. Also Professor of Law at City

University of New York Law School.

**Susana Ruiz:** Solo con tu mirada me dices todo lo que quisiera saber.

**Haymee Salas:** I would like to say to everyone to understand the importance of origin.

**Fanny Sanin** was born in Bogotá, Colombia, and has lived in Mexico, London, and, since 1971, New York. Her work has been the subject of 31 international one-woman exhibitions.

**Elaine Soto**, Ph.D. Puerto Rican artist-psychologist born and raised in New York. Currently an artist in residence at Taller Boncuá/Puerto Rican Workshop and has private practice, both in NYC.

**Merian Soto** is a New York-based Puerto Rican dancer and choreographer, committed to supporting Latino new dance and performance work. She has collaborated and toured extensively with visual artist Pepón Osorio.

**Carla Stellweg** lived and worked in Mexico for over 25 years. Founded and edited first contemporary Latin American art magazine, *Artes Visuales*. 1987-88 was curator at Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art in NYC. 1989 started Carla Stellweg Latin American and Contemporary Art Gallery in NYC.

**Awilda Sterling** is a painter-performer-dancer-choreographer performing her work since 1974. MFA Pratt Institute. Has received various NEA choreographer's fellowships. Co-founder of Proton, a dance-theater group based in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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**Gladys Triana:** Born 1937 in Camaguey, Cuba. B.A., M.Ed., L.I. University. Cintas Fellowship, 1993. Selected museum exhibitions in Santo Domingo, 1991; Chile, Caracas & Mexico, 1990.

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**Regina Vater**, Brazilian artist who lives in U.S. for more than 13 years, was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1980. Has shown in U.S., Europe & Latin America. Her transmedia work is inspired by Brazilian roots & deals with images & concepts from both African & Amazon traditions.

**Viveca Vázquez** is a Puerto Rican independent experimental dance person. Active in developing a community of alternative dance and performance in her native San Juan since the 1980s. Works as a mother, teacher, dancer, choreographer, producer and lecturer.

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**Cecilia Vicuña:** Chilean poet & artist living in New York. Most recent book: *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water*, Graywolf Press, 1992.

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\* All notes written by contributors except those preceded by an asterisk.

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*-Cookie S. Comebala, Macondo Cultural Center, El Paso, Texas*

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